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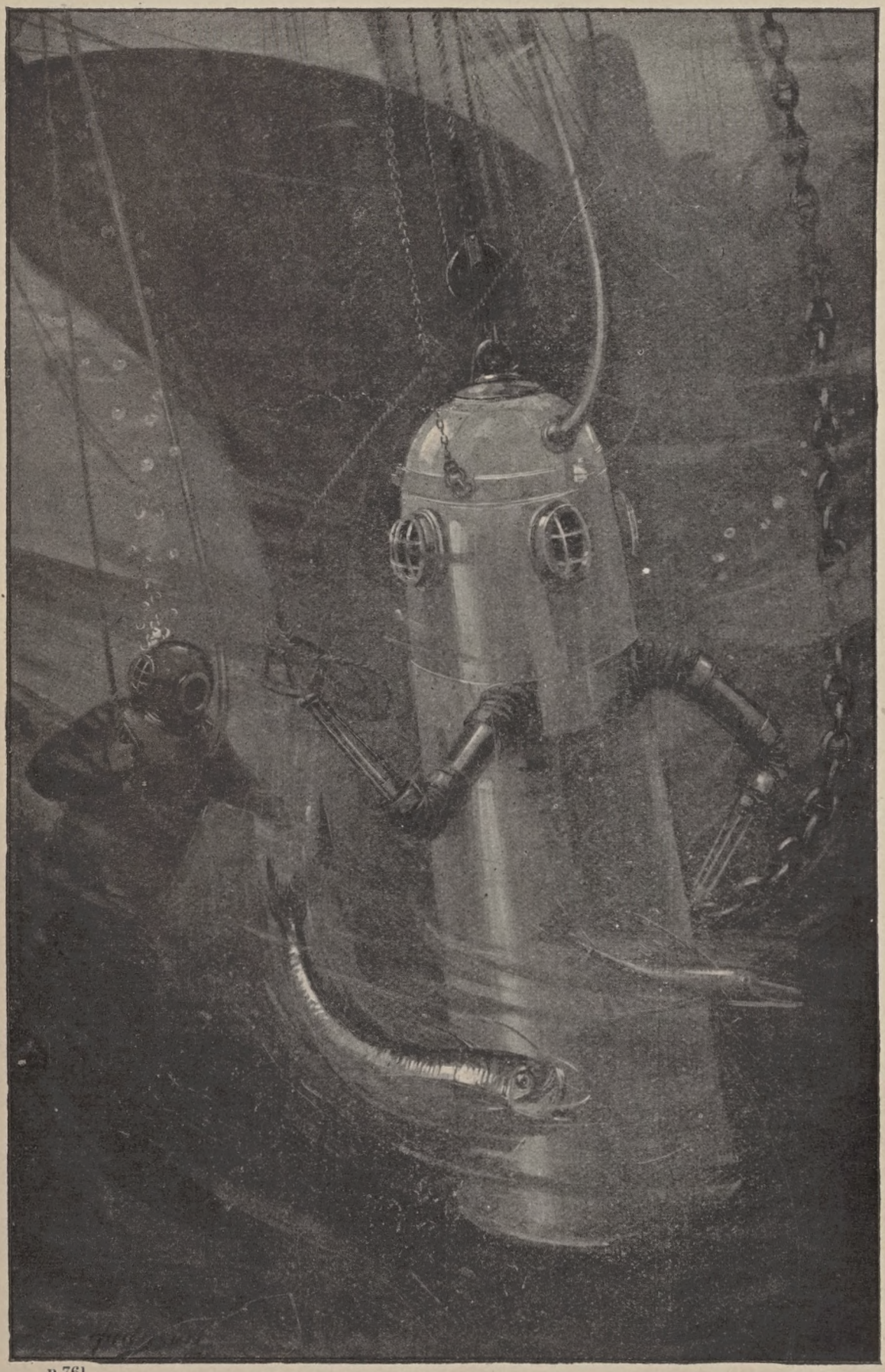

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"THE HULL OF THE *CINDERELLA* LAY BEFORE HIM"

# THE PEARL SEEKERS

## A Tale of the Southern Seas

BY

ALEXANDER MACDONALD, F.R.G.S.
Author of "The Lost Explorers," "The Quest of the Black Opals," "In Search of Eldorado," etc.

*ILLUSTRATED BY EDWARD S. HODGSON*

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# PREFACE

I HAVE based this story on some personal experiences in the South Seas, and on some well-known incidents which occurred there, of which I happen to have some special knowledge.

The many coral-fringed lagoons which dot the south-western Pacific are very rich in pearl-shell deposits; but the best of them are within the German sphere of influence. Nevertheless, I know of one or two parties which set out from Sydney to work those vast shell beds.

Islands appear and disappear in the region indicated in a manner that would seriously interfere with navigation were there any trade routes in the vicinity.

As for the adventurers, I need only remind my readers of the gang of very modern pirates who stole the Highland Railway Company's steamer *Ferret*. This vessel, as is well known, was engaged in several more or less nefarious practices before she was finally recaptured at Melbourne.

Youthful inventors we have in every city of our empire, and what could be more natural than that such a combination of intelligence and enthusiasm should embark upon a scheme which offered such alluring pros-

pects? Youth never takes risk into account, and often that fact helps considerably to carry a venture through. Captain Inglis is a specimen of the reckless type of sailors that the "Younger Nations" are rearing to help to keep the old flag flying, and Ah Sing and Kotay are with me just now, as real as flesh and blood can be, in North Queensland.

ALEXANDER MACDONALD.

# The Pearl Seekers

## CHAPTER I

## The Partners

It was a stormy night in late autumn, and most good people whose business did not compel them to be outside were sitting round comfortable fires at home. Out in the suburbs of the great city the storm raged fiercely and the wind and rain blew down the streets in violent bursts of fury that, to the unfortunate homeless beings with whom every large city abounds, caused the cheery dwellings behind the glowing blinds to appear like visions of Paradise. But there were at least three people out that night in Worchester who gave little heed to the storm, and they were converging from the three most outlying districts on the suburb of Rosedale, towards the last house in the main roadway. In this house a youth of about eighteen years, on whose handsome face were engraven the deep lines which denote the student, sat at a table and scrutinised carefully a very complete chart of the world.

"One-five-eight—five, by four, two, three," he muttered. "No, there is no island marked there, and this is the latest chart I can get. Evidently some of

these dots scattered between the Solomons and the Bismarck Archipelago are meant to indicate generally that there are islands throughout the area they cover, so if our island is known there is certainly little attention paid to it, and that is good enough for us."

He paused and pulled out his watch, and at that moment footsteps sounded on the gravel path outside and the door-bell rang.

"That will be Jack," he continued, rising and walking towards the door. "It is just three seconds past eight, but I can't complain of seconds on a night like this." He gave three peculiar knocks on the inside of the door before opening it, which were immediately responded to by a repetition of the same on the outside. "One five eight," he then called.

"Five," came the answer, "by——?"

"Four," he cried, listening intently that he might make no mistake.

"Two three," came back from the outside; "and hurry, Tom, it is very cold out here."

"All right, Jack," said the student, opening the door; "but we must be careful, you know, for now that our advertisement is out all sorts of inquisitive people may come prying around."

"Is it out?" inquired Jack, as he entered and hung up his soaking coat.

"Yes, I read it in two of the evening papers tonight, so our visitors may begin coming any time. But come in to our meeting-room. We have four minutes and one second to wait before David and James arrive."

The two passed into the room where Tom had been

studying the chart, and sat down. It was the only lighted apartment in the house, which was what is usually described as a villa.

The new-comer seemed much more youthful than the other, but in point of fact he was only a week younger. His was a happy disposition, and as he never worried himself about matters that did not call for his particular attention, the lines underneath the eyes and in the forehead, so prominent in his companion's, were absent in his face.

"Is it really ready, then?" he asked, a trace of boyish eagerness in his voice. "Did the parts and the tubes all fit?"

"Certainly. They were made to our own sizes, and could not therefore do otherwise than fit.'"

"Oh, I forgot for the moment, Tom, that I was talking to one who had made a science of exactness. Other people often make mistakes, you know."

"But we don't, Jack; we can't afford to. But here are the others; I made five minutes past eight their hour, as three of you coming together might attract attention. Satisfy yourself that it is our comrades, Jack, and let them in."

Jack went to the door as the bell rang, and knocked as Tom had done, receiving in return the answering signal. "One five eight," he cried, before opening the door.

"Five, by——?" answered those outside.

"Four——" he further suggested.

"Two three," completed his comrades.

"Anything else," demanded Jack, who, although knowing very well by the voices and by the correctness

of the answers that those seeking admission were his comrades, dearly loved to prolong any situation which savoured of mystery.

"You can add 'south,' if you like," came the prompt reply, "but if you don't hurry up we'll add something else when we do get inside."

"Come in," said Jack throwing open the door and admitting his comrades, David Thomson and James Powell, two young engineer apprentices of the same age as himself. They passed into the room where their fourth comrade sat, and thus were gathered together the four partners in a scheme as wild and improbable as any dreamt of in their generation. They termed themselves the Union Quartette, because they comprised one of each country forming the British nation. Tom Grenville, the leader of the party, was as English as could be. Jack Davis was of Welsh extraction, Thomson was a Scot and of very powerful build, and Powell was a son of the Emerald Isle. Grenville was a student in Worchester University, and a brilliant one. Davis was a budding chemist with a love for experimenting which his employer and friends said would some day carry him higher than ever his own efforts would. He was certainly inclined to be careless. Both Thomson and Powell were engineers of the type that one day develops into men who take command of big things.

On that dismal night in October, however, the four partners had come from the outlying parts of Worchester to hold a final meeting to discuss their plans and prospects, and all were brimming over with enthusiasm, although Grenville did not show it to the same extent as his comrades did.

"Well, boys," said Grenville, as they seated themselves round the table on which his map lay spread, "you all know what we are here for; but as it is just possible that some of us do not recognize the risk or the importance of our next step, it is only fair that I, being your elder——"

"Cut that out, Tom," cried Davis; "there is not one here more than ten days younger than you, and Thomson is only half-an-hour——"

"—Should lay everything before you," continued Tom, ignoring the interruption, "so that you can fully weigh the responsibilities and definitely decide upon the project that lies under our immediate consideration."

"A very good speech that," commented Thomson critically. "Fire away, until we see what it is about."

"And don't be any more long-winded than you can help, Tom," said Powell; "I am just burning to get on to the next stage."

"Very well, gentlemen,"—Tom's style was that of the lecture-room,—"to go over matters briefly for the sake of placing on record in our minutes a general idea of our project, so that, should anything happen, those who may be interested in us may know all that is to be known, is my intention. We four comrades of the last several years, having observed that this country, like all civilised countries generally, was overcrowded, and that competition in everything was already so great that very little chance existed for the rising generation of attaining to fame and fortune before they were too old to take advantage of what these adjuncts offered, resolved that we would strike out on a new line for ourselves in parts not yet commercialized by the influence of civilisation. Our friends laughed at us for holding

what they termed nonsensical and impracticable ideas, but we had recognized before we left school the great truth that if one sets one's mind upon any object, however distant it may appear to be, one will assuredly reach it some day, by dint of constant application; and so we persevered in our endeavours to accomplish our ambition. That was, as you know, to transport ourselves to a certain island in the South Pacific Ocean, with suitable appliances to work the vast deposits of pearl shell which we believe exist there at depths from a few feet to the ledges round the island at sixteen fathoms. We decided on doing this while yet at school, the day after the information that such an island and its treasure existed reached me in the strange manner you know. We need not further enter into that matter at present; the information, we had every reason to believe, was reliable, and our investigations have borne out our beliefs so far. But between that island and four boys who did not possess among them more than a few shillings lay half the world, and then between the island itself and its treasure lay anything up to one hundred feet of water—vertically. However, we made our plans; you, David and James, became engineers so that you might yourselves invent and construct any appliances required. Jack plunged into the mysteries of chemistry so as to be able to supply any knowledge in that line which might be necessary; and I, as we all agreed, devoted myself to acquiring information on all subjects likely to be of service to us. The results are such as we may well be proud of. We have now in our possession, in the next room, a patent diving apparatus which we know can do submarine work that no other dress hitherto invented

is able to perform. We also possess several other pieces of apparatus which will ensure our being able to raise the pearl shell when we arrive at the island, and now all that remains is to get there."

"And that seems to be a problem that can't be solved so very easily," put in Thomson. "I am inclined to fancy we should have thought of that part first, and then invented and built our diving-dresses. I do not wish to appear down-hearted, for I am not, but the getting to the island will require something more than thought concentration, I fear."

"Well, has not everything come out as we calculated so far?" demanded Grenville.

"Yes, but the next part is beyond us. We have made everything ourselves as yet, but unless we start to make an ocean liner now I don't see how we are to get to the South Pacific."

"It does look as if fixing our mind upon getting there will not help us much," said Powell. "I was talking to my father last night about the various ways of raising money for anything, and he almost had a fit when I suggested our plan."

"I don't care," said Davis. "We have done things already which looked just as impossible, under Tom's directions, and I do not doubt for a moment that he will engineer us through this last part too. Why, boys, just think of what we have done, and what means we had to do it. Just imagine four boys renting an empty house like this and working secretly during our spare time to complete, bit by bit, that dress and those air-pumps, and that invention of David's and a host of other things. Why, we could sell those things now and

start to make them over again, and the money we got for the first lot would pay our passages to the nearest port by one of the big liners."

"Boys," interrupted Grenville, "I must protest against this spirit of doubting which seems to have risen among us. It is fatal to our enterprise. We must be whole-hearted. Have we not accepted it as our first maxim that mind is superior to matter."

"But can it annihilate fifteen thousand miles of ocean?" asked Thomson.

"Certainly; the human mind is never more ingenious than when it is confronted by an apparently impossible barrier. I admit that we cannot transmit ourselves by thought, but we can so apply our minds to other things —less abstract if you like—and thus call different forces into play, which by reacting will indirectly bring about our required result. But we must not doubt. We must settle on our object, and calmly, as we have done in the past, plan our way towards its accomplishment, and when unforeseen difficulties arise, as they must do at times, recognize them as such, and bring our mental powers again into play to enable us to surmount them or get them removed. Now, this trouble of getting to the island was evidently a long way ahead, even as there are minor worries to be contended with after we are there, and, as you know, when we first arranged to make those appliances in the next room ourselves, we agreed to advertise for a fifth partner when the time came. He was to buy his fifth interest at a price calculated to provide all necessary funds, and as we worked all that out last meeting and I have adjusted and tried the dress since myself, we are now ready to welcome our fifth partner.

"But we have grown older than when we first

thought we could get some one to provide money to carry out the wild scheme of four schoolboys," said Thomson. "No one would look at an advertisement such as we could insert in the newspapers. We have no guarantee; nor dare we take him into our confidence for fear that he might himself apply his money to carrying out our scheme with our patent."

"And anyhow," said Powell, "if any one did answer our advertisement, it would probably be some crank who wouldn't pull with us, or some one out of idle curiosity. I think we'll have to try some other plan. But what sort of advertisement could we concoct at any rate——?"

"Here is what I inserted this afternoon," replied Grenville, "and it is out now in at least two papers: 'Wanted a partner with capital sufficient to carry out a great wealth-raising scheme in the South Seas. Only a fifth interest will be given, and no dealings will be transacted with any one except those who are ready personally to pay the money. Apply Seaview, Rosedale.'"

"That's splendid," commented Jack when Tom had finished. "I like the way in which the definite and indefinite articles have been used, and the general completeness of the thing. Any one could see that we did not spare expense for the sake of an adjective or two."

"No," agreed Thomson with his usual imperturbable face, "and they cost a halfpenny each too; but who do you think would answer that thing unless some one anxious to know what our scheme is, when we have not even stated how much money is required?"

"I had not thought of that particular point, David," said Grenville; "I'll get it altered to-morrow. But now

that everything is finished and we only await our fifth partner, are you all sure you can take part in our adventure? As you know, no one cares enough about me to interest himself in what I do or where I go, although my uncle has really done all he could for me since my parents were lost."

"And I am the same as you, Tom," cried Jack; "my parents don't care what I do so long as I don't get into serious trouble."

"As for me," said Powell, "I can't hope to help my people by remaining in this overcrowded country, and it is therefore in their interest I go away. They may raise objections, but they will be of a sentimental kind only."

"My father and grandfather were adventurers before me," said Thomson. "They did not ask their parents' consent when they began filibustering, and I see no reason why they should object to me following their example."

"Except that we are not filibusters, David," said Tom.

"Oh, call it what you like. I don't care although we become pirates, only the twentieth century has no sympathy with them. Hullo, boys! I heard the gate clang. Some one is coming here."

"It may be a policeman," whispered Jack. "There goes the bell."

"Who can it be?" said Powell. "No one has any right here, and no one knows us."

"It will be some one come to offer himself as our fifth partner in answer to our advertisement," said Grenville, rising to his feet. "You fellows had better get behind these curtains and put on your masks. I will talk to him and find out what he really wants." He

walked to the door, and the others slipped behind the curtains as directed.

The bell rang violently a second time before Tom reached the door, but he did not hurry himself, and before he did eventually open it he held concealed in his hand a tiny revolver. A cloaked figure stood in the pouring rain on the threshold and in the dim, straggling light that issued from the one lit room gazed at Tom for a moment without speaking.

"I am afraid you have made a mistake," said Tom at length, "and I fear I cannot assist you much in finding where you wish to go, as I am a stranger here myself."

"Is this Seaview?" asked the stranger abruptly.

"That is the name the house bears," answered Tom.

"Then I have come in answer to your advertisement. If I like the appearance of those holding the other four-fifths, I will join you. But you might ask me inside. I am freezing."

"I beg your pardon," said Tom. "Come with me." He turned and led the way towards the room where his comrades were. "Would you kindly close the door," he said to the stranger, who followed him. The latter walked back the few steps necessary to comply with his request, and Tom watched him closely. "Two feet six, steps," he muttered. "Ah, well, I don't think he'll leave without our consent."

"Why, the door is closed," cried the stranger. "What do you mean by asking me to close an automatic-closing door?" He was somewhat suspicious, and stood still for a moment in the hall.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Tom. "I had forgotten. I am growing very absent-minded."

"Lead on, then. Excuse my not removing my coat, but I usually like to see where I am before I do that."

"Doubtless a wise precaution; but you came here of your own free will, and at the present moment can take your leave without any one interfering with you."

"Oh, no, I do not intend leaving, my strange friend, until I know more about this South Sea scheme."

"Then come in here," said Tom, "and I will satisfy you as far as I think proper."

They entered the lighted room, and the stranger beheld Tom's boyish features and cried out in astonishment: "Why, you are only a boy!"

"I might say the same of you if your face were a little more uncovered," retorted Tom coldly.

"I meant no offence. I merely wondered how you could possibly have any connection with—well—that advertisement."

"From which I infer you take it to be not what it purported to be."

"Not exactly. Something in it appealed to me, and I was very curious."

"Thank you, but we have more to do than satisfy curiosity. Good evening."

"But if everything is square I want to become a member of your syndicate."

"Then I am afraid we cannot give you any guarantee. My comrades and I will tell you our plan, and then if you are still willing to join, and can provide the funds, we will show you what we have done. First, of course, we want to know who you are. Here are the other three partners."

Powell, Thomson, and Davis emerged from behind the curtains as he spoke, masks covering the upper part

of their faces and completely concealing their identity. The stranger sprang back and placed his right hand in his coat pocket. "I did not think I was coming into a den of robbers," he said quietly.

"And you are wrong if you say we are anything like that," cried Thomson aggressively.

"Oh, am I?" Then why this mystery? Can your faces not be seen? Really, I think you are very foolish to try this game on in these times. How do you know that I am not a detective with a dozen men round the house now?"

"We have broken no laws," began Jack.

"It will be bad for you if you are one of those prying policemen," said Powell.

"He's only a boy," said Thomson more kindly. "Give him a show, lads. He is plucky, and probably made a bet with some little schoolgirl cousin or some one that he would come alone and find out what our mysterious scheme was. He is no more a policeman than we are robbers."

The stranger was scrutinising the visible part of the faces of the four as Thomson spoke, and apparently noted that the upper lips of all had never required the use of a razor. He kept his hand in his coat pocket, nevertheless, and Tom knew that his hand grasped a revolver there. His own was up his sleeve.

"We know you are not a detective," said Tom in a somewhat softer tone of voice than he had used previously, "but, as my companions fill positions in town and we do not yet know who you are, they dare not make themselves known until we have some assurance that you will not cause them trouble."

"Do you mind telling me what your great South

Sea scheme is, then, and perhaps I will be able to satisfy you that I have no ulterior motive in coming here." The stranger had been somewhat excited during the conversation between the four comrades, but he had now regained his composure. He threw back his coat and removed his muffler, disclosing the features of a young man not more than a year or so older than themselves. His face, though determined in expression, was a pleasant one, and the four partners were at once favourably impressed.

"Our advertisement was rather vague," began Tom, "because we had no experience in that sort of work; but, briefly, what we wanted was capital to enable us to get out to a certain island which is extremely rich in pearl shell. We have already invented and constructed machinery and appliances which practically ensure our success when we arrive there, but we cannot move farther until we obtain money to pay our passages to Singa—to the nearest port, and to purchase some sort of craft on which to continue our voyage and bring back our spoils. We, of course, also require funds to equip our own vessel, buy stores and some necessary tools."

"How much money do you want?"

"We have everything figured out. Passages for four to the nearest port cost one hundred and fifty-two pounds."

"But I thought he who provided the capital was to be admitted as a partner?"

"Certainly."

"Then you will have to make allowances for five passage tickets."

The partners looked at each other. They had not

dreamt of matters assuming such a business-like form so soon.

"That will cost exactly one hundred and ninety pounds, then," said Tom, "and an extra ten pounds for food-stuffs, of course. We do all the work ourselves, and all partners are alike in every way."

"I see; but how do you mean to procure your papers for the voyage to your island at Sydney——?"

"Sydney!" cried all. "Who mentioned Sydney?"

"No one, but as thirty-eight pounds is the price of the ticket, and that is the present price of the cheapest P. & O. passage to Sydney, I assumed you meant that port."

"You are very shrewd," said Tom, with a smile; "but, as you cannot do us any harm with that knowledge, we may as well admit that Sydney is the port we would prefer, although Singapore also has advantages."

"Yes, I suppose so. We could purchase a suitable lugger there much cheaper. But what is the total cost?"

"Tickets, £190; lugger, £250; stores for six months, say, another £50; and then allow still another £50 for incidental and unforeseen expenses. That makes £540 in all."

"I can see none of you have ever travelled before," laughed the stranger, producing a cheque-book; "you must indeed be very innocent if you think you can travel more than half-way round this planet without spending more than your passage money. What about dock dues, port expenses, hotels, customs, arrangements for the final setting out, and the necessary labour?"

"No," said Grenville, "we have forgotten nothing, nor have we made any mistake. We naturally were

prepared to pay our own incidental expenses, for we have no right to expect our partner to pay for anything beyond the bare cost of the expedition. As for the labour, I think I have already said we will supply all that ourselves."

"And you already possess a diving-dress, and know where you are going?"

"We have built an improved diving apparatus, and have also several other appliances calculated to help us in our work, and we know exactly where we are going."

"All right. I want to be the fifth partner in the adventure. Here is my cheque. Satisfy yourselves tomorrow that it is in order, and come and dine with me at my home, so that we may get to see each other's faces. After that, perhaps, I will be taken into your confidence a little more, and I shall do all I can to be as useful a member of the expedition as any one. To whom shall I make the cheque payable?"

"There is really no special hurry about payment," said Grenville; "we are not in absolute want of money just now. If you, after due consideration, think you would like to join us, we shall be very glad."

"Then here is your cheque. Fill in any name you like. My name is Richard Preston; my father is dead, and I am joint owner with my uncle of the City Iron Works."

"My name is Tom Grenville, and I am very glad to welcome you as our partner. Take off your masks, boys, and let me introduce you."

The three comrades removed their coverings and the new partner uttered a cry of surprise.

"Why, you are all boys," he said.

"Time will remedy that fault," laughed Thomson, shaking hands. "Is that all you see, partner?"

"I know you. I have seen you two before."

"Naturally," agreed Thomson; "Powell and I are apprentice engineers in your employment."

"And this is Jack Davis, our chemist," added Tom. "So now that you know us all you can still decide as to whether you will join us or not."

"Tear up that cheque," cried Preston. Tom at once obeyed, and a look of disappointment crept into the faces of the others.

"I am indeed glad to be associated with such partners," continued the new addition to their ranks. "I have often heard our foreman engineer talking of the merits of you two, and I only regret that the works will suffer when you leave. Mr. Davis, I also think I have heard something of you."

"Yes, I was mixed up in that explosion the other evening," put in Jack, with a smile. "My name went pretty nearly everywhere as the careless chemist who caused it."

"Don't you believe that," cried Tom. "Jack has already made several important discoveries."

"Partners, you will, I am sure, allow me to say as one having a fifth interest to look after," interrupted Preston, smiling an apology to Tom for breaking in on his remarks, "that you have sadly underestimated the expenses of our trip. In our office I know we nearly always add fifty per cent. on calculated cost and take that figure as a base for any estimate, and I am sure we will find it so too."

"Then you do not mean to join us?"—the speaker was Grenville, and his voice was cold.

"I beg your pardon, partner, but I do, and I am going with you to one five eight——"

The boys stared at the speaker in alarmed astonishment.

"—But I merely wished to make my cheque out for one thousand pounds, as I think that will be nearer our requirements."

"But what did you mean by the words one five eight?" demanded Grenville. "Have you heard?"

"I heard nothing from any of you fellows, here or elsewhere; but I happen to know of an island somewhere on that meridian that is reported rich in pearl shell, and assumed that it was your island."

"Oh! Then others know of our island?"

"No, I don't think so. I will tell you later how I came to know. In fact, it is that knowledge that brought me here to-night. But can't you come out with me and have supper at one of the hotels in town?"

"We would much prefer that you would have supper with us. We are all good cooks, for we have been studying the art of cookery, so that we should not suffer too much on the island."

"Then let me help. It is time I knew something about that too."

A loud ring startled them, and they looked at each other wonderingly.

"That will be another partner, I suppose," said Tom, "but they are a little bit too late. Go into the kitchen, you fellows, and prepare some supper while I interview him."

"But you are not having any more partners, are you?" asked Preston anxiously. "I can raise more money myself if it is required."

"Our syndicate is complete," answered Tom, "and not even the King of Britain could buy in now, although we might give him some shares," he added musingly. Stepping to the door as the others hurried away, he turned off a switch that he had put on for Preston's benefit should he have proved other than what he was, and waited for the next peal. When it came he opened the door and beheld a tall figure. The rain was still pouring in torrents and the street lamps near had been blown out by the wind.

"I have called in reference to an advertisement in to-night's *Star,*" the stranger said; "I presume I have come to the right place?"

"You have," answered Tom; "but you are too late."

"My dear boy—for I can see you are only a youth,—I was so interested that I came right away when I read the advertisement. I know it is late, but I feared that if I waited until to-morrow some one might be before me."

Tom was just about to tell the stranger that it was not the lateness of the hour he meant, when, acting on some impulse, he said, "Well, if you will come in for a few minutes I will explain."

"Thank you," said the man, "I will not detain you long, and I have brought my cheque-book with me."

"There is no need for that," said Tom, showing his visitor into the room just vacated by the four partners; "I am very sorry, but we are not looking for a partner now."

"Ha, ha! You know something, after all. Never mind, I rather like you to run up the value when a customer appears; it is good business. But never mind, where is this island of yours?"

"You misunderstand me. We have withdrawn our advertisement."

"Oh, have you? My dear boy, please don't trouble telling me fairy tales. I know all about that game. Just tell me where your island is—it is in the New Hebrides group, I think—and what your plans are, whether you have any special machinery, or if——"

"I beg your pardon, sir, but we made no mention of an island in the New Hebrides, nor of machinery."

"Oh, then it is in the New Hebrides. Well, then, tell me all about it and I'll give you my cheque for what you want."

"We do not wish your cheque, and you must excuse my not telling you anything about any island in the New Hebrides or elsewhere."

"But what did you mean to do in the South Seas?" The speaker's tone was changing.

"Gather cocoa-nuts, I think, or dig for copra."

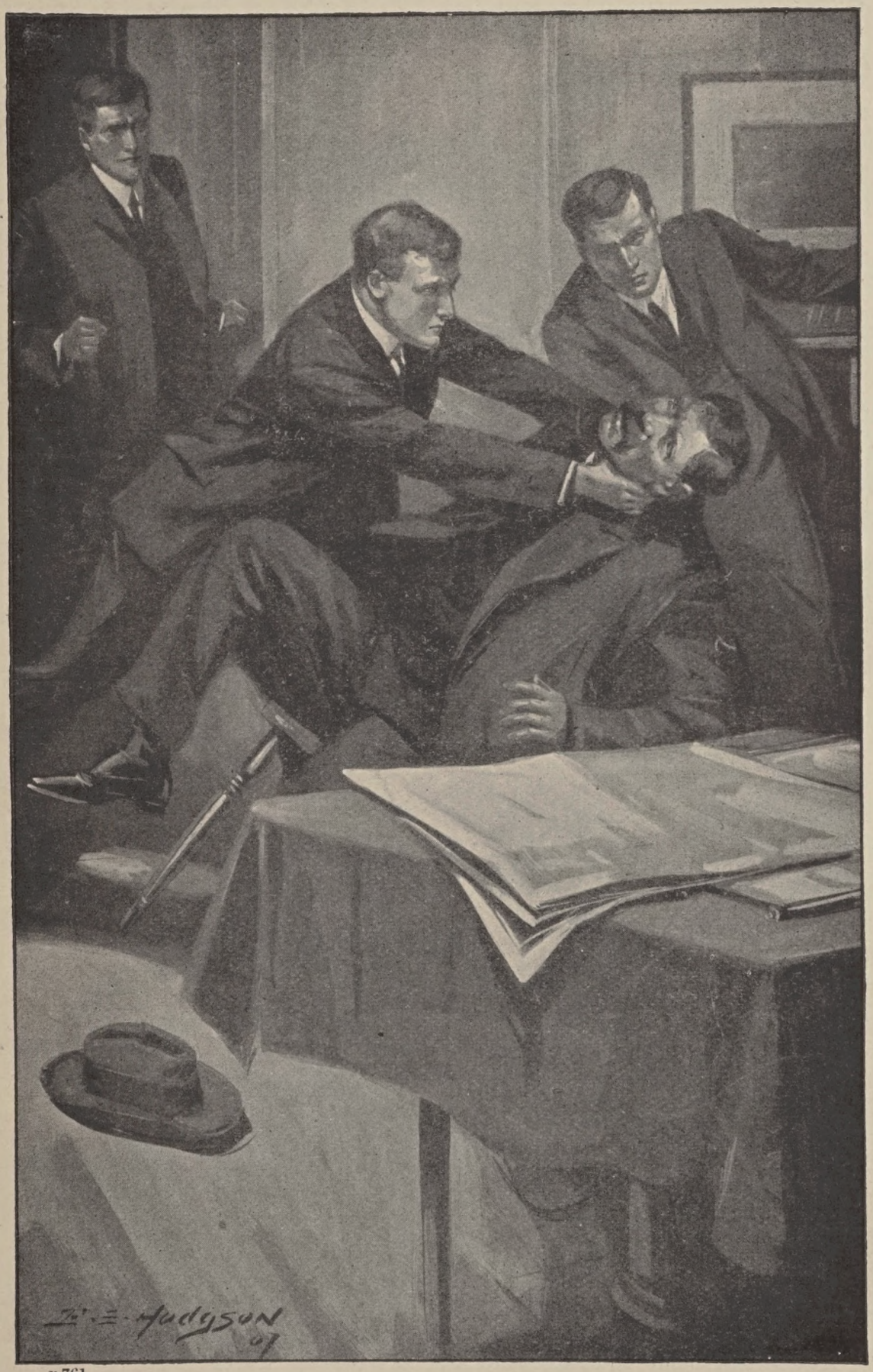
"Boy, you have no right to try to make a fool of me; I have sailed the South Seas all my life. And allow me to remind you that you do not dig for copra; that is the dried extract of the cocoa-nut. Come now, no more of this nonsense; I feel greatly interested in your scheme, and am willing to buy into it."

"And we are not willing to have you." While speaking, Tom had thrown a newspaper over the chart, which still lay on the table, but the stranger saw the meaning of the movement.

"Ah, is that your chart?" he cried, reaching over; "now, I'll soon know——"

"Take your hands off that chart, sir, and sit down in your chair," ordered Tom sternly.

"What, my young bantam!" cried the other, sitting

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THOMSON THREW HIMSELF UPON THE MAN

down again nevertheless, "are you going to try the high hand with me?"

"Will you kindly rise and walk out of this room?" said Tom coolly.

"Yes, but it will be to have a look at those patents of yours," laughed the stranger. "Oh, I know all about your work. I have watched the lights in this house often."

"Then you refuse to leave?"

"When I am in possession of the knowledge I want I may. Why, you stupid fellow, there is no one within sound of your cries, and I am going to lock the door—What are you laughing at?"

"You, you third-class thief?" roared Thomson bursting into the room and throwing himself upon the man. The other boys followed, and witnessed their comrade throw himself into grips with the stranger before the latter seemed to think of defending himself.

"Come back, David," cried Tom, "I've got him."

Thomson sprang back hastily, and the stranger sat up in his chair and then prepared to rise, a look in his eyes which showed diabolical intent. But he did not rise. Tom turned on a small harmless-looking switch and the intruder suddenly stiffened himself out and screamed.

"As you yourself told me," said Tom immovably, "no one can hear your cries, even if any one were about on a night like this, so you may save your breath."

"What's wrong with the man?" asked the new partner in surprise. "What is he yelling for?"

"Because he is in what we term our electrocution chair, and the current is on," laughed Jack, "and he can't get out!"

"You young devils, turn that—thing off or I'll murder you all!" roared the squirming victim; "I'll break every machine you have got in the house, and tell the police I was trapped here."

"The police will see for themselves about that," returned Tom; "and for every oath you utter I will turn the handle round to another of these contacts."

"Come and have supper now, partners," called out Powell. "Let the beggar alone. He can't leave without our permission."

"Well, I think there is little fear of our failing to do whatever we put our hands to," laughed Preston. "Who would have dreamt what risks I ran if I had given cheek."

"We had you fixed quite another way," said Tom. "It's only in absolute self-defence that we do this. Do any of you know this person? He seems to know something of us?"

"I have seen him before several times," answered Preston. "He often visits my uncle at the works. Hullo! Look out, boys."

The stranger had suddenly become aware of a wire running under the edge of the table, and had gripped it in his teeth. It was the wire leading to the terminal copper upon which his feet rested. Next instant he had sent his teeth through it, and, before any one could stop him, he had sprung to his feet, grabbed at the table, and made for the door.

"Throw the outer door into circuit!" shouted Tom. "Come back, Preston. Don't, boys! Preston will get it too. Ah! he has escaped; perhaps it is just as well." Jack had sprung to some switches just outside the door of the room, but he hesitated to throw them round when

he saw Preston running after their prisoner. Next moment the outer door was opened, and their first enemy disappeared in the darkness of night.

The five partners looked at each other.

"He's best away," said Thomson. "But I am glad I got a punch at him."

"I never thought the power of advertising was so great," commented Jack reflectively. "Just fancy two people in one night ready to put their money into something they know nothing about."

"Don't run away with that idea," laughed Preston, as they went back to the room. "None of the two is so ignorant as you think, and I should not be surprised if we had more visitors now."

"By Jupiter! we're getting famous, boys," cried Powell. "I can see the sunny south within our reach now. But we had better prepare for further visitors."

"We won't admit any more," said Tom. Then addressing Preston he said, "You observe the electric current is laid on here."

"They may not ask for admission," said Preston. "If you have any method of preventing people from coming in without your knowledge, let us use it at once."

"Perhaps you are right. Set the trap, boys, and let us have some supper. I am hungry, and I am sure you must all be even more so than I am." Tom touched Preston on the arm as he spoke, "If it so happens that you rush after any other visitor to-night," he said, "do not step on those painted patches or you will not be able to leave them until the current is shut off. Those patches are films of copper foil, and are alternately connected, so that the circuit is completed when you have a foot on each."

"But all the pressure of current in the city mains would not affect a man insulated with his boots on."

"But we transform that current into many times its original voltage by means of that little machine you hear ticking in the next room. It is rather expensive to keep working, for it consumes current all the time, but Powell's patent is better than a force of policemen."

"We'll have to hide our wires more carefully," remarked Thomson, as he repaired the broken wire that led to the chair, and examined the foot-plate to see that it was all right. "Hullo! What's wrong now?"

Tom was staring at the table. "Our chart is gone!" he cried. "That man has stolen it!"

## CHAPTER II

# Unwelcome Visitors

A LONG silence ensued, then Thomson laughed. "What on earth does it matter about the loss of the chart?" he said. "The island is not marked on it, and the thief could just as well have bought one for himself. No one but ourselves knows the position, and we need no marked chart to remind us of one five——"

"A moment, please," put in the new partner; "I do not know the position of the island yet, but I would advise that we commit it to memory and thus obviate——"

"We've done that," said Jack, "it is our pass-word."

"The position of the island is longitude 158° 5′ and latitude 4° 2′ 3″," explained Grenville, "and when we expect each other here and do not know if it really is one of ourselves we repeat the figures in a meaningless manner between us before the door is opened." Here Jack and David gave an example, and then Tom put Preston through the figures.

"That is very good," the new partner agreed, as they adjourned to partake of what had been prepared for supper; "but seeing that we are watched now, and our expedition likely to become of greater interest to others than you at first allowed for, would you mind my suggesting that in future we take the precaution of reversing the figures."

"Give an example," said Tom.

"Well, let the first person who has to answer simply say five; then the other can answer eight five one, and start the other figures by saying three; the first person then can complete the reversed position by the words two four."

"I think it a wise precaution," agreed Thomson, helping himself to some cold ham, "for we may be sure that, seeing something of our project has leaked out already, we shall be watched pretty closely when we begin our final preparations, which cannot be so easily hidden."

"Let's adopt the new system, then," cried Powell, laying down his cup. "It will be a hopeless jargon to any one who may overhear us, and will serve just as well to keep the figures in memory."

"I vote for it too," exclaimed Jack; and, seeing all were agreed on that point, Tom said, "Well, boys, I declare the new system to be in force from now on, and no notice will be taken of any one who uses the old way of the figures."

"Well, partners," at length said Preston, "it is now after ten o'clock; I must be going. I expect I'll have to walk home too, for the last car will have gone by the time I get in to town."

"But you haven't seen our shell-raising plant yet," cried Tom. "Will any one be uneasy about your absence if you do not get home until early in the morning?"

"Oh dear, no. Uncle is a bit strict, but he'll be asleep. Oh, I say, partners, you must come around and dine with us to-morrow evening. He's a regular brick, but you'll have to help me to explain why he'll be losing two of his favourite engineers."

"Then stay here to-night and see what we've got to show. David and James remain to work all night every Friday, and of course one of us must always be here now."

"Then, hang it all, boys, I'll stay. We may have trouble before morning, anyway."

"Oh, I don't think so," laughed Tom, "we are well defended. But if you are ready we'll go into the next room, our workshop, and see the invention of our engineers."

"And I'll get away home," said Jack; "my people will be anxious, for I did not tell them I would be late. Jupiter! hear the rain beating against the windows. I hope there are no people watching the house. I feel of some importance now, knowing that people think it worth while to be interested in us."

"I'll go home with you," said Powell; "some of those beggars may be outside, and may follow you. I can come back again."

"Perhaps it would be just as well," agreed Tom, thinking a moment and looking at Preston as if asking his opinion.

"I should certainly advise our leaving this place in twos after this," the new partner said, to Jack's secret delight, for, although by no means faint-hearted, he was very romantic, and his fancy had already pictured cloaked figures springing out on him from every dark recess. Powell put on his coat with Jack, and the two departed together, Thomson switching off the current to allow them to walk safely to the door, and turning it on again after they had departed.

The remaining partners then followed Tom into what should have been the drawing-room of the house, but

had been converted into a workshop. The windows were screened very carefully and securely by shutters which were barred in an unique manner that would tax the ingenuity of the most expert housebreaker to break through.

Tom switched on the light, and there were revealed several strange-looking objects in various parts of the room, but the apartment generally showed that all work on them had now been completed, for there were but few signs about common to a workshop.

"This is our improved diver," said Tom, pausing in front of a large tube-like structure about seven feet in height. "It's the joint invention of Thomson, Powell, and Davis, and has one or two features not found in any other form of diving apparatus."

Richard Preston gazed at the strange object. It was about three feet in diameter, with a slightly broader base. All round it were what looked like lenses, and here and there were peculiarly-shaped flexible arms suspending loosely by the side of the great central tube which formed the body. Coils of copper wire and rubber piping lay about it, and there were brass joints in the structure where they evidently fitted on. An air-pump of somewhat odd construction lay beside the contrivance, and a large boiler-like affair also stood near.

"May I ask a few questions?" ventured the new partner, after he had taken in all that the eye could see.

"Certainly; you are one of us now, and must know everything, so as to be able to assist in the working of the diver," replied Tom, while Thomson busied himself screwing up some joints which his trained eye had noticed required attention.

"Then how do you keep this tube—I mean the diver—in a vertical position, for I presume a man must go down inside somehow?"

"The bottom of the casing is filled with mercury sufficient to keep the weight of the diver and its occupant in a perpendicular position at any depth," replied Tom. "Try and push it over."

Richard put his shoulder against the affair, but it resisted his effort of strength and did not move. "Try now," said Thomson, opening a valve somewhere near the bottom and causing a semi-liquid mass of silvery white material to run out into a receptacle placed to catch it.

Again Richard exerted his strength, and this time the wonderful diver toppled over into the arms of Thomson, who with a laugh lifted it easily and carried it across the room. "It is built of a patent aluminium bronze," he said, by way of explanation, "which is stronger than steel, and only a fraction of the weight."

"But, boys, you have a fortune in that alloy alone. My uncle would pay anything to get it."

"Perhaps," said Tom grimly, and Thomson laughed; "but our experience of selling inventions has not justified us in trying to raise money by placing this discovery before any ironmaster. Besides, we require all our inventions ourselves to carry out our pearling idea."

"And I actually get a fifth share in everything and have all the fun and excitement for a paltry thousand pounds," said Richard reflectively.

Then an idea seemed to strike him, and he added, "Never mind, boys, we'll carry our pearling expedition through, no matter what it costs. I think I can make

my uncle give me any money I want; but—have you tested the deep sea behaviour of this affair? How do you know that it will work at any depth under water?"

"It will work up to at least twenty fathoms," said Tom quietly; "but it has never left this room since it was built."

"Then how do you know?"

"Because all last night I was inside it, and it was inside that boiler over there. Jack pumped water into it until the pressure was more than equal to that of the hundred and twenty feet level, and I experienced no difficulty in breathing under the necessarily increased air pressure, which Jack also pumped through a hundred and twenty feet of rubber tubing likewise subjected to the same external pressure. We spoke to each other all the time, too, through our telephone, which is another little invention."

"Dear me, this is marvellous, boys, and to think that two such engineers worked as apprentices in my own works."

"And these are arms controlled from the inside," continued Tom, indicating the hanging appendages; "they are worked by the diver himself, and can gather up anything within their reach easily. When the diver wishes to move farther, he simply tells us through the telephone and we pull him along."

The sound of a rapidly-driven cab approaching made him stop, for cabs were unusual in their quiet suburb at that time of night.

"It has stopped," cried Thomson; "it will be more answers to our advertisement."

"No, I think the wind is blowing the sound away,"

said Tom; "I have often noticed that when alone here at night."

"Well, partners, it is all very wonderful, these inventions of yours and your scheme. By the way, how do you know that there is such an island as you hope to find?"

"My father, who was a sea captain, told me," answered Tom. "He went away in command of a new steam yacht some years ago, and has not been heard from directly since. A year after he sailed a letter came to me from him which had been thrown into the sea in a bottle, and the letter told me of this island and its treasures."

The door bell ringing loudly again interrupted him, and the three boys started violently. There was something uncanny in people coming to the door after midnight.

"It will be Powell," said Thomson, rousing himself; "I'll let him in."

"Remember the new version of the signals, then," called out Tom, as his comrade went to the door.

Tom and Richard listened. Somehow they felt that things were not altogether right, and they heard David give the peculiar knocks on the inside of the door before opening it, and also heard the answering signal given correctly.

"Hullo!" Thomson then cried. "You haven't been long. Give me the word first for a change."

"One five eight," came the response, almost drowned by the roar of the wind.

"Oh, is it?" cried the interrogator. "Then I am afraid you will have to remain outside until you can remember differently."

"Come away, David," called Tom; "if he has forgotten already we had better give him a lesson." Thomson rejoined his comrades, and they listened for the next summons to the door. But none came, and concluding that Powell had gone home in the sulks, they went on showing their new partner the wonders of the room until another hour had passed. Then there was another ring of the bell.

"What is it this time?" groaned Thomson. "I never knew the power of the press was anything like this before. Just fancy what a half-crown advert. has done. It is a good thing, Tom, you didn't put in five shillings' worth or we should have a crowd outside." Another loud peal interrupted him, and he hurried to the door. He was just about to open it when something prompted him to give the two knocks always signalled when the visitors might be one of themselves, and, to his surprise, it was answered.

"The word," he cried; "this is a committee meeting and you can't come in here at one o'clock in the morning without giving the pass-words."

"Shut up, then, and listen to them," answered the person outside. "How does five suit you? Can you continue that?"

"Yes, eight five one—you proceed now after this—three——"

"Two four, and hurry up; it's cold out here."

Thomson opened the door, and admitted Powell. "So you remembered them at last?" he said as he closed the door again and switched on the current. "We thought you had gone home in the sulks."

"What are you talking about, Thomson? You know I went home with Jack. He's a bit unstrung to-

night, and I can hardly blame him, for there was a man following us all the way into the town. I left Jack there and came back, running all the way, for I imagined I saw men in every doorway. No more advertising for me, David."

"But weren't you here about an hour ago?" asked Richard in surprise.

"No, certainly not. Why, what are all you fellows frightened about? What has happened?"

"It is nothing," said Tom; "only we must be extremely careful now, and one of you must always be here with me for fear of accidents. Go to sleep, you fellows; you'll find the rugs before the fire in the bedroom upstairs, and remember you've got to turn out to your work in about five hours. It is the last time you will have to do so, however, for we shall all be needed here after this to hasten preparations for our departure."

"If there is anything else you would like made, tell us," said Richard. "All our works are at our disposal for the making of anything special; and we need tell no one, seeing we can do everything ourselves."

"Thank you," said Tom, "but everything in that line is finished. We merely have to pack up now and find out the times of the most suitable steamers."

"The *China* leaves next Friday," said Powell. "She is a good boat."

"Can you all be ready by that time?" asked Tom. He knew his friends could, and his question was mostly directed towards Richard.

"Certainly," replied that individual; "but we must have an evening with my uncle first. He will give us any help we may require, and—Hullo! more visitors?"

Again the bell resounded through the house, and again the partners looked at each other in amazement; it was after two in the morning.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" cried Tom, as they all went to the door, picking their steps carefully.

"Let me in," cried a voice, as if out of breath from running. "Five."

"It is Jack," cried Powell. "Something has happened. Open at once."

"Eight five one," responded Tom, ignoring the agitation of the others. "By three."

"Two four," came the answer, and Tom at once threw open the door. Next moment something was thrust between the door and the wall to prevent its closing, and a man burst in. "We've caught you this time," he cried, with an evil laugh, and at the same instant a sound of glass being broken came from the drawing-room.

"Run, Thomson!" cried Grenville. "Some one is breaking in by the window." But Preston had already skipped over the heavily-charged floorway, and Thomson had jumped upon the person who had entered by the door. He was a strong man, however, and without any apparent effort he threw the boy the full length of the hall and then turned to Tom, who meanwhile had cast out the obstacle in the doorway and closed the door. Tom kept his nerve. "Well, what do you want?" he said. "I have not the honour of your acquaintance."

"No, I suppose not," the intruder answered; "but I and my friends are here to see what you have in this house, and as I suppose we'll have to chain you

all up before we can do that, well—here goes!" He leaped at Tom as he spoke, but his intended victim sprang aside and retreated down the hall. The man rushed after him, but had only taken two steps when he uttered a yell and stood transfixed, his eyes starting from his head and his body twisting in weird contortions.

"You are safe in the meantime," remarked Tom, and with Thomson ran into the other room. Here they found Richard sitting upon the prostrate form of another man, a revolver in his hand, with the influence of which he evidently kept the prisoner still. A huge hole in both window and shutter showed how he had entered.

"Have you got the other?" asked Richard, looking up. "This fellow fell through the window right into my arms. He's been working at the outside for some hours, I take it."

"Let us up, guvners, an' I'll blow the whole show," entreated the prisoner, who appeared to be a ruffian of the lower classes. "I'm only a pore hard-working man, an' I am only the small fry in this game."

"Indeed!" said Tom. "Whom are you working for?"

A cunning look came into the man's eyes, and he appeared to hear for the first time the oaths of his paralysed companion in the hall.

"That would be tellin'," he leered. "Wot will I get——"

"As much as the law can give you," broke in Preston. "I know you; at least, I have seen you before, and——"

"Tell us who employed you to break in here," interrupted Tom, "and if you tell the truth we may let you go."

"It was a big, tall man with a black beard, an'—an' a ring on his finger with a blue stone——"

"Nonsense," interrupted Thomson. "You needn't lie to us. Who is the person? What is his name?"

"Just climb through that hole in the shutter and blow this whistle," said Preston, handing Tom a policeman's whistle, "and we'll get rid of them in no time."

"For the Lord's sake, don't, an' I'll tell everything," cried the man, starting up until the muzzle of Preston's revolver touched his forehead.

"Proceed, then," ordered Tom, halting.

"It was the fellow you've got that's swearing so horrible now. He planned it all himself. Says he to me, 'Jim,' says he, 'there's something good in a house down in Rosedale.'"

"You are lying again," said Richard; "blow the whistle, Tom."

Without a word Tom climbed out, and the sound of his whistle awakened the echoes of the silent streets. The storm had now spent itself, and the night, or rather morning, was very quiet. In less than a minute a policeman appeared, and was soon made acquainted with everything. He did not seem to be surprised in the slightest, until he saw that it was boys who had summoned him, then he gave vent to an exclamation: "But you don't mean to tell me that you kids collared this customer yourselves?" he cried. "He's one of the cutest in his trade. My mate and I have been watching him and his mate all night, but they've been watching us too, it seems. Now, if we only could catch

Slippery Charlie, that's his confederate, inside some house where he shouldn't be——"

"He's in the hall now," said Tom. "Come here and see if this is the man."

The policeman followed Tom in silent amazement, and at once recognised the other as the person he had named. "This will put you up comfortably for the Christmas holidays, Charlie," the officer laughed. "I wonder at you being trapped by schoolboys."

"I'll get even with them for this," roared the prisoner. "Turn that confounded thing off. I'm about dead now."

"Take care," warned Tom, as the policeman stepped forward to see what was keeping the prisoner from making some effort to escape. Tom's warning came too late, and the law's representative found out all about it, and squirmed and howled until Tom switched the current off. The moment he felt relief the prisoner rushed to the door, but Thomson tripped him up, and next moment the policeman had his wrists securely handcuffed. Blowing his whistle for more assistance, he kept his eye on his men until it arrived in the shape of two policemen from neighbouring beats, then he marched the prisoners away.

"You'll hear from me later," snarled the one who was known as Slippery Charlie.

"Oh, doubtless," responded Tom, yawning. "We'll give you a warm welcome if you come in person."

"No threats, Charlie," cautioned one of the officers, gazing admiringly at the boys. "It will just mean a longer holiday, you know."

"As for you, young Preston," roared the other prisoner, "you were mighty curious to know who sent me

here. Well, I'll tell you, an' I hope you and your pals will like it. It was your uncle."

The partners were again left to themselves; but they said nothing. The accusation was overwhelming, and Richard was stunned for the time. Suddenly Thomson broke out in a laugh.

"What's the matter?" inquired Powell. "Where is the joke?" The others also looked reproachfully at their comrade, but he only glanced round on their melancholy visages and laughed again.

"Surely you don't mean to say you believe what that man said! he cried at length. "Can't you see that that was meant as a kind of revenge. He evidently knew Richard here, and calculated that what he said would give him a bad time."

"I only wish I were quite sure of that," said Preston thoughtfully. "But—well, never mind; we've won, and as we'll be leaving this country next Friday we can take care of ourselves till then, and sleep here beside our property all the time if need be."

"Let us think no more of what the man said," spoke Tom. "He is a liar, I am sure. To-morrow I will book our passages. At the beginning of the week we'll pack everything, and by Thursday we can have said good-bye to any friends we happen to have, and catch the night train for London."

"I wish we could get away earlier," said Richard. "The whole town will ring with this night's work, and the newspaper people will spread the story everywhere."

"Then let us throw the things as they are into a cart when daylight comes, and remove them somewhere else," suggested Thomson. "We can then be quite open with the police and others, and tell them we were

merely holding a meeting when these people broke in; and there will be nothing to show that there was anything extraordinary about the meeting, and I am sure the prisoners won't tell."

This suggestion was agreed to, and two hours afterwards, just as day dawned, they roused a carter from his slumbers and removed everything.

## CHAPTER III

# The Raising of the 'Cinderella'

THE P. & O. Liner *China* glided swiftly down the Thames, carrying on board an army of wealthy and delicate Britons who did not care to suffer the cold of approaching winter. On board also were the five partners, filled with enthusiasm and hope as they realised that they had actually started to cross the globe to that little speck amidst the waters which loomed so large in their eyes. When they left the river and entered the more unruly waters of the Channel, however, a good deal of the enthusiasm died away; for they were all landsmen, and, excepting Richard, who proved to be a very good sailor indeed, had never been to sea before. But after the Bay of Biscay had been left behind and the dim hills of the Portuguese coast appeared on their port side, they began to take a fresh interest in everything and were greatly charmed with the novelty of their surroundings. Gibraltar was soon reached; then after a smart run up to Marseilles, where the overland passengers came on board, the *China* headed for Port Said through the classical waters of the Mediterranean. Port Said, the half-way stopping-place between East and West, offered much amusement to the boys with its bands of beggars, its bazaars, and its coal lumpers, and then the famous Suez Canal took up their attention. The Red Sea was navigated in record time,

and an old world wanderer among the passengers pointed out to them where lay the future Red Sea port, Port Sudan. Aden was the first port that offered any attraction to them, for of course, although the whole voyage was new to them and highly interesting, they had read all about the various settlements so often that they almost felt like old travellers. Knowing, too, that they were bound on a mission that would furnish many surprises and adventures, even to experienced travellers, before they were finished, they had schooled themselves so as not to be surprised at anything, and, as a result, the seasoned voyagers who prided themselves on their knowledge, and generally had a crowd of listeners around them, thought the five mysterious young men very lacking in the spirit of enthusiasm. No one knew what their mission was, but many tales were current on the ship as to what the five inseparable comrades were to do. Some said they were all going out to get experience in sheep-farming in Australia; others that they were clerks in the employment of a big soap firm about to open up a business in Melbourne; and a few gave it out that the five were bound for the Fiji Islands to start sugar-cane growing, and added that they had originally intended to try that industry in North Queensland, but the new labour laws had made that impossible. The last people nearly always, after giving their ideas, broke into a fierce tirade against the—according to them—bad and unfair laws of Australia, and then went off at a tangent from the subject they had begun to talk about; and the five partners smiled at each other and kept their own affairs secret.

At Aden, however, they were greatly interested in the diving boys, who for a silver coin would dive from

the ship's rail, and sometimes even pass under the keel and come up on the other side. Of course, a quartermaster chased them overboard into the sea whenever he saw any of them on deck, but they only laughed and came back again when they thought he had departed, or swam round the steamer entreating the passengers to throw a coin into the water.

"It seems to me," said Tom, as they watched them, "that these fellows could make a fortune diving for pearls."

"Not so easily as it looks," answered Richard; "you see the sharks would have a voice in the matter."

"But there are dozens of sharks out there. Look, there is an ugly black fin now!"

"Yes, and see how the divers are getting out of the way and climbing into their boats. Now, the sharks are bad here without doubt; but where pearl shells are they are much worse; they feed on the oysters, you know."

"Dear me, you seem to know everything," said Tom.

"Oh, I've travelled a bit before, and well—I've seen the pearlers at Broome, in Western Australia, and have also gone out in a pearling lugger at Thursday Island, in Torres Strait—But hullo! There goes the engine telegraph. We're off again."

Several times during the run to Colombo the partners were surprised at the knowledge of their fifth partner. He seemed to know everything when pressed or asked for information, but at other times he appeared to be one of the greenest new chums on board. At Colombo they witnessed more diving, and in the shops saw some very fine pearls from the pearling grounds around the island; but they resisted the wiles of the

crowds of gem merchants who were continually requesting them to buy diamonds, rubies, and other stones supposed to be of almost priceless value, but which the dealers assured them in quaint language they would sell to them for a few rupees. A nine days' run after leaving Colombo brought them to Fremantle, the port for Perth and the West Australian goldfields. Adelaide was reached four days later, then Melbourne, and finally Sydney, the queen city of the South. And the dream of their lives was in part accomplished, they were now within two thousand miles of their mysterious island.

Here Richard's experience proved of very great value, and instead of the worry which the partners had been expecting to have with Customs, and baggage agents, they found themselves seated at lunch in the Hotel Metropole within an hour of their landing, Richard having arranged the transferring of their cases, and all Customs details, in a few minutes' conversation with some one whom he seemed to know.

The boys were enraptured with Sydney. Instead of the sleepy Colonial town they had expected to find, here was an up-to-date city, with electric cars flying about in all directions, and buildings superior to those of Worchester. The magnificent harbour, too, was a source of keen delight to them, and on the first night of their arrival, as they sat on the upper deck of the North Shore ferry and watched the brilliant effects of the many moving harbour lights, they thought they had reached an enchanted land. Next morning they examined their cases and found everything all right, and then began to prepare for the last part of their journey.

"Well, boys," said Grenville, as they formed themselves into a meeting in a corner of the large smoking-room of the hotel, "let us formulate our plans at once and get ahead, for every day here means expense, and leaves us with less money to spend on what is essential."

"Fire away," said Thomson, laying down the paper he had been reading, but keeping his hand on it.

"We'll carry out your plans whatever they are," added Preston.

"Well, we must procure a vessel of some kind now, which we can navigate ourselves, get our gear and stores on board, and set out for our destination. We will keep inside the Great Barrier Reef, and by the time we are off Cooktown, in Queensland, where the only practicable passage to the open sea is, we'll have gained enough experience to handle our craft outside, and in any case the distance from there is only about nine hundred miles. We know the power of advertising, so I propose we insert a carefully worded advertisement, in the *Morning Herald* and the *Telegraph*. Any amendment to that, partners?" Tom looked round on his comrades.

"None from me," said every one in turn except Thomson: he was a young man who had great self-reliant powers and thought for himself, and it often required all Tom's tact to keep matters smooth between himself and his assertive comrade.

"I would like to read an article in this morning's paper to you before we do anything," Thomson said. "If that proves of no interest to us in the opinion of you all, then, of course, Tom's idea can be put into force at once."

"Go on, then," said Grenville, sitting down; "but speak low; two men have come to a table in the corner behind you."

"Listen, then," continued Thomson, taking up his paper and reading: "'We understand that the steam yacht *Cinderella,* which sank last week off Naarabeen rocks, will be put up to-day for public auction by Messrs. Gordon and Co., Pitt Street. We do not think the purchasers will make much of their deal, as, although a new vessel with remarkably high engine power, she lies, it is reported, between two rocks at a depth inaccessible to divers.'" He laid down the paper and looked around inquiringly.

"Well?" said Davis. "What has that got to do with us?"

"She'll be sold for very little," said Thomson, "and we might buy her."

"What is her size?" asked Powell thoughtfully.

"I inquired half an hour ago, and learned that she is a craft of about two hundred tons."

"I see what you mean, David," said Grenville with a smile, "but I fear you overestimate our powers."

"No, I don't. I looked up last week's paper in the writing-room this morning and I find that the water she lies in is not more than sixteen fathoms."

"Hush," warned Richard; "these people behind are listening."

The partners at once became silent, and busied themselves with newspapers, and then became listeners themselves, for after a pause one of the two men at the table behind laughed and said to his companion, "They are only boys. Go on with your story. When we met last, in Hong-Kong I think it was, you were in command of

the B. & D. Company's old barge *The Eastern Star.*"

"Yes, but the Company sold her to B. P. & Co., and they didn't require my services," the other said with a laugh that had a touch of bitterness in it.

"What have you been doing since?"

"Scraping mud off some of the banks in the Pacific on a trader. By Jupiter! if I could get hold of a craft myself, I know a scheme that would pay. But you seem to have rubbed along all right; the last time we met you were a supercargo or something on a cattle boat, and knew as much about navigation as I knew about farming."

"True, Bob," laughed the other; "but you see my old man has become a director of the Pacific Trading Line since then, and what is the use of having a director for a father if he can't give his son a command?"

"You were always lucky, Sam," commented Bob. "I don't suppose you could lend *me* your old man for a time?"

"Well, no, Bob. He is of great use to me, and I couldn't part with him; but I'll put you up to something. You said you could do great things with a craft of your own. Well, buy the *Cinderella* to-day—you heard what these kids were reading? I know from old Roderick the diver that she is not between the rocks at all, but in the Naarabeen sandbank; in fact, I got a wireless message that her sea-cocks were opened before she went down, and in my humble opinion there was some crook work about the business."

"I'll buy her and risk raising her. Can you stand by me if the price goes above a five-pound note?"

"Certainly, old fellow. I can raise a hundred in

ten minutes, and my wonderful old man will back me as far as I like to go. But come on, the sale is at eleven and it only wants ten minutes from that time now."

The two men rose and departed, and the partners looked after them. The men were both young, and had pleasant but bronzed faces; they walked with a gait that proclaimed them to be seamen.

"Come along, boys," cried Tom. "It seems, after all, that the sale of the *Cinderella* will have some interest for us. It is a pity that we'll have to bid against that young fellow who wants her, for I rather like his face; but business is business, and if she is not jammed between the rocks I think we want her too."

"But she will be too big for us to handle," objected Jack, as they walked out.

"No, she won't," returned Thomson, happy that his idea had suddenly developed in importance. "Powell and I will be engineers and firemen combined, and we can raise her with our improved diver as easily as if we had her on the end of a crane."

Richard did not speak, he appeared to be thinking deeply, and the boys walked towards the auction room. They reached it as the item preceding the yacht was being sold. It was a desirable villa residence in one of the suburbs and was knocked down for two thousand pounds.

"Whew!" gasped Jack. "If prices are like that we'll have to wait till the water freezes and walk to our island."

"Shut up," growled Thomson, "here's the *Cinderella.*"

"Now, gentlemen," cried the auctioneer, "I have to

dispose of that splendid steam yacht many of you have doubtless admired in the harbour recently. I refer to the *Cinderella*. How much am I offered for a start?" He evidently did not think much of the importance of the item.

"I'll risk a fiver," shouted some one from the far end of the place.

"Put me down for ten," cried a man with a pronounced Hebraic expression.

"Fifteen," said a person standing beside Tom, and looking up he recognized the man who had expressed his desire to get the ship, in the hotel.

"Twenty!" shouted Thomson, in answer to Tom's signal, and people looked around to see who the fool was. The auctioneer seemed surprised. He had not expected any competition. Remembering his duty, however, he cried, "What! Is twenty pounds all I am offered for that splendid gem of the shipbuilder's art? Don't be foolish, gentlemen. Remember I have my commission to make. Come now, twenty pounds for the magnificent *Cinderella*. She's worth as many thousands."

"If she were floating," interjected some one, and the crowd laughed. A Sydney crowd is always ready to be amused.

"Shelp me gracious! I will risk twenty-three," cried the Jew, looking round at the bidders behind as if they were robbing him.

"You can have it for me, Moses," shouted the man who had made the first offer. "I'm not having any submarine residences yet."

"Thirty," interrupted the sailor beside Tom, and the auctioneer almost fell from his perch in astonishment,

and a man in the surprised crowd roared: "He's opening a home for mermaids."

"Come on, gentlemen," cried the auctioneer. "Think of the fortune the P. & O. *Australia* made to the man who bought her when she lay on the rocks at Port Phillip Heads. Thirty pounds wouldn't pay for the carpets on the floors of the *Cinderella's* cabins."

"Thirty-three!" shrieked the Jew. "Mine Gott! Vil any man rob me more?"

"I will, Abraham," cried the bidder who had offered thirty. "I'll go without my dinner to beat you, and raise it another five shillings."

"Ten shillings more," howled the other, and the crowd shouted their approval in words not altogether complimentary.

"Forty pounds," sang out Thomson, receiving Tom's signal again.

"Forty pounds. Forty pounds," repeated the auctioneer, looking half-sorrowfully at the bidder. "She's a hundred odd feet under water, you know," he said, as if wishing Thomson would withdraw his bid.

"Say, young fellows, are you thundering fools?" spoke the sailor bidder to Tom and his deputy. "Do you think you can go and picnic on the *Cinderella's* decks?"

"Yes, after we raise her," said Tom. "Are you going to bid more?"

"Great snakes! When you *raise* her. Do you mean to try that?"

"Forty pounds. Forty pounds. Going at forty pounds," bellowed the auctioneer. "The beautiful Clyde-built submarine *Cinderella* going at forty pounds."

"Say, young shentlemen, you haf no right to rob

me. I will gif you ten pounds if you will not bid again, and I will take her," spoke the Jewish gentleman, pushing his way towards the partners.

"Kick him, boys," said the sailor. "Do you really want this craft? Quick. I'll go a sovereign more for her if you want to get clear."

"We mean to have the vessel, sir," said Tom.

"Then gif me ten pound or I will raise her price again," cried the Jew.

"Don't, boys," advised the other. "If he raises the price, leave it to him. No, I'll not bid any more against you, seeing you are fresh new chums."

"Going! Going! Gone!" shouted the auctioneer, and the *Cinderella* belonged to the partners.

"It was a schwindle!" shrieked the Jew. "I vas going to bid more. Here, I will gif you twenty pounds on your deal," he said, turning to Tom, who was making his way forward to sign the necessary documents.

"Clear out, Moses, or you'll get into trouble," ordered the sailor. "If you pester these boys, I'll shake you out of your miserable skin."

"Oh, we are not afraid of him," said Thomson. "We're a pretty rough lot to handle ourselves." He made a threatening movement as he spoke, and the Jew departed hurriedly. Then the partners retraced their steps to the hotel, feeling very important indeed, for were they not the owners of a steam yacht? The fact that she lay at the bottom of the sea was a mere detail to them.

"We'll see about hiring a tug and some chains and have a look at where our yacht lies without delay," said Thomson at lunch. "I expect Powell and I will have

our hands full during the next little while raising her and making all repairs."

"Do you mean you will try to get her up yourselves?" asked Richard, in amusement. "Why, that is a contract for an army of divers and several powerful tugs and scores of men."

"Not with us," said Powell proudly. "Thomson and I have ideas of our own about these matters, and I fancy we can raise the *Cinderella* as well as any salvage contractor in or out of Australia—Hullo! here is a reporter. I know him by his ferrety eyes."

"May I ask if you are the gentlemen who bought the wreck of the *Cinderella* this forenoon?" the person whom Powell had indicated inquired.

"We are," said Grenville, "but we prefer not to give our reasons."

"But you will surely let me have something to say. What do you mean to do with her?"

"Oh, it was just the excitement of the sale. We wished to be able to say we owned a steam yacht," said Richard, "and the feeling is well worth the price paid."

"But you cannot even break her up. She won't even sell as old iron."

"We are not going to break her up; and look here—to put it plainly—how much will you take to leave us alone and keep all other press papers from pestering us?"

"I beg your pardon, I am not a blackmailer. If you do not choose to give me any information, I can find out by other methods."

"Come away, Jim, and leave the budding fleet-owners alone," interrupted a voice, and the boys saw their

sailor friend of the morning seated at a table near them.

"Hullo, Bob! Where did you drop from?" cried the pressman, looking round. "Just wait a moment and I'll be with you. I've been insulted."

"It was unintentionally then," said Tom. "We understood that it was the regular thing in Australia to buy the silence of the Press."

"Shade of Pitman! Do you hear that, Bob!" The pressman appeared to be about to have a fit.

"Well, isn't it true?" inquired his friend. "And, even allowing the youngsters have made a mistake, why make yourself a nuisance to them? They want to be left to mind their own business. They bought that wreck over my head to-day."

"Will you gentlemen dine with us?" said the tactful Tom suddenly, seized with an inspiration. "We are strangers here, and do not know how things are worked in Sydney. We will tell you all we can of our ideas, but we had thought it was the usual thing to pay for non-interference."

"Howling dingoes! Hear him!" exclaimed the pressman. "He's rubbing it in still."

"Well, never mind. They are all new chums, can't you see? and anyhow the dressing will do you good. Great Southern Cross! man, it is not often you meet original people. Look at the copy you can make."

The pressman burst out laughing. The humour of the idea that the Press was a blackmailing institution had suddenly struck him. Most people would have paid any money for the sake of the advertisement of an interview.

"Will you join us, gentlemen?" said Richard. "I am very sorry."

"Don't worry, boy," laughed the pressman good-naturedly. "Perhaps you were not so very far wrong after all. Certainly, I will join you. I like to meet people from the old country."

"And you can bet your new steam yacht I will too," cried the sailor, coming forward; "and if you need any friends in this place just count on me, and you don't need to say a word about yourselves."

"Oh, well, if it comes to that," said the pressman, "I represent the *Telegraph,* but I'm not a prying sneak, and if you have some private affairs on hand, I give you my word that I'll respect them."

The two men sat down with the partners, and Tom signed to the waiter to attend on them, and the conversation became general.

"Well, boys, I must say it is a long time since I had the pleasure of dining with such an original company," remarked the pressman, who had introduced himself as Jim Penfold, as the meal neared conclusion.

"He usually dines with the Members of Parliament, you know," explained Bob Inglis, late captain of the *Eastern Star,* and all laughed. Meanwhile Tom and Richard had been talking together in an undertone, and as the laughter at the expense of the law-makers died away, Tom said:

"Mr. Inglis and Mr. Penfold, our manner of introduction has been rather strange, but perhaps the friendship between us will be more lasting because of that. My comrades have just requested me to ask you if you would again give us the pleasure of your company to dinner on board the *Cinderella* some day next week."

"What!" cried the two men. "On board the *Cinderella!*"

"My dear young friends," said Penfold, "we are not fishes."

"I hope I didn't say you were," said Tom.

"But the *Cinderella* is at the bottom of the sea!"

"She won't be then."

"Then you mean to raise her," cried Penfold. "Boys, I had thought of that myself, but I fear it is impossible."

"Oh, we don't believe in that word. Will you be on board, say, next Friday evening, a week to-night, at seven o'clock?"

"If she's floating, I'll be there," cried Penfold.

"And I'll attend though I have to go in a diving-dress," said Captain Inglis.

"Then as we have little time to waste in hunting round for appliances and necessary tools, can any of you gentlemen tell us where to go to procure a steam tug and a barge with steam winches?"

"Great centipedes!" exclaimed Penfold. "You are not going to attempt to raise her yourselves, are you"

"We have that intention," said Tom.

"But you are only boys, and to raise that ship would tax the skill of the best engineers and divers in Australia."

"Nevertheless, if she is worth raising we will float her at the beginning of next week, if we can procure a tug and some chains."

"I'll get that for you," cried Inglis. "I had that all arranged for myself. My friend, Captain Seymour, who was with me in this hotel this morning, is even now waiting for me on board one at Circular Quay. He thought the craft was sure to fall to us, and went

off to charter a tug so that we could go and have a look at where she lay."

"But your friend may not feel kindly disposed towards us," said Richard.

"What! Jim? Why, he'll laugh for a week at the idea of boys beating us."

"Lord, what a scoop this would turn out!" groaned Penfold; "and I cannot use it. Say, boys, do you mind me coming out with you? I am a reporter, that's true; but I won't say a word in the paper unless you give me leave, and I am mighty curious to see how you are going to carry this thing through."

"You may come and see the ship raised, if you like," replied Tom. "But we will not start until Monday morning, as we cannot stop in the middle of our work, and we have to gather together several tools. If you would kindly show one of us where that tug lies, Captain Inglis, we would be grateful, for we could charter it at once."

"But look here, boys. The owners will do you in for more than the tub with its kettle is worth. Now, if you would allow me to arrange the affair I am sure it would save you more dollars than would buy your tram fares.—But perhaps money is no object to you fellows?"

"On the contrary, it means a great deal," said Tom. "We have only a limited amount to work on, and although it is ample, yet we cannot afford to be foolish in our expenditure, and we shall greatly appreciate your help if it is not putting you to a great deal of trouble."

"Not another word," cried Inglis, rising. "Some of you who know all your requirements come along with me and we'll get everything fixed in no time."

"Thomson and Powell, you are our engineers; you had better go with Captain Inglis and get on board the tug by to-morrow everything that we shall require."

Without a word the two engineers got up and followed their new friend, and then Penfold turned to the others. "Haven't you a job for me?" he asked. "I am as good as an ordinary workman, at any rate."

"I thought you were on the staff of the *Telegraph?*" said Richard, with a smile.

"My dear boy, the *Telegraph* wouldn't think me worth the price of the gum on a postage stamp if I didn't get my finger in this little pie."

"But you have already promised secrecy," said Tom anxiously.

"And I'll be as secret as a Federal Minister in all you wish. I only want to write up something I have an idea for now, and you yourselves shall revise the proofs and score out whatever you think affects you. Now, give me a job."

"Well, we will," cried Richard. "Do you see that man out in the hall—that one with the umbrella and the eye-glasses?"

"That sailor fellow? What of him?"

"In the first place, he is disguised; for I saw him adjust his beard through that mirror over there. In the second place, he is looking for us; and as he seems to be, begging your pardon, either another pressman or some one prying into our business, we would like you to tackle him and act for us.—Confound him, here he comes. Some one has just pointed us out to him."

"Are you the gentlemen who bought that wreck this morning?" the stranger asked politely, coming into the dining-room.

"Bull's eye first shot," answered Penfold, taking upon himself at once the position Richard had given him.

"Then what will you take for her?"

"Oh, we're not inclined to sell."

"Oh, come off that. Just name your figure without any beating round."

"Um. Whom are you acting for?"

"Never mind, I'll foot the bill. What's the total? The blamed train from Newcastle was late to-day, or I would have got her at the sale. She was sold only two minutes before I got there, and I've been hunting round for you fellows ever since."

"I am sorry, but she is not for sale."

"What! You can do nothing with her."

"Excuse me, we can. We can close the sea-cocks, and probably her port-holes, and raise her, and incidentally have another inquiry as to how she sank."

"Do you mean to say——"

"—That if you are within this hotel when the police, whom I am now going to summons, arrive they will pull that beard from your face, and I fancy Captain Carron will have another little spell in Darlinghurst Temperance Boarding Establishment. Oh, you are off? Sorry—Good-bye."

The boys looked at Penfold for an explanation, and just then Inglis came in in a great hurry.

"I've been offered a thousand down for the *Cinderella,* boys, so I came back to tell you. Your chums wouldn't come—said they left all these things to you, and bet me my skipper's ticket against their next dinner that you wouldn't sell."

"A thousand pounds," reflected Tom. "Why, with

that in addition to our own money we could go straight away and buy——"

"You have lost your bet, Captain," cried Penfold. "I am acting here now, and only a minute ago I dropped on information worth a gold-mine. It was the insurance people sold the boat to-day, and who do you think wanted to buy her back just now? He said he was too late at the sale. No, you couldn't guess. Captain Carron, her last skipper; and if that does not make it plain to you that the *Cinderella* is worth her original cost price minus the expenses of lifting her—well, you are denser than I take you to be."

"Captain Carron!" cried Inglis. "Great Sydney! Why, he was mixed up in that affair about the *Booloomooloo!*"

"And also the *Dingoe,* and the *Bathurst Lass,* and probably several others."

"Then I know it all now. Seymour told me this morning. The *Cinderella* was sunk on the crook for her insurance; they sold her to-day, and Carron was to buy her back and probably change her name and work the same racket over again in New Zealand or elsewhere. Boys, I congratulate you—the *Cinderella* will be worth ten thousand. I'm off to fix about the tug." Inglis ran out, and the others moved into the smoking-room, thinking many things. Jack's thoughts were that it was an easy matter to make money after all. Richard and Tom wondered when they would be able to sail off to the island, and Penfold thought that never had a greater scoop come to any man.

Shortly afterwards Penfold left to attend to his own business, and Jack prepared to draw up a list of stores

they would need for their cruise, while Tom and Richard went out to make some purchases.

They all met again at dinner in the evening, having accomplished their several missions—Captain Inglis coming back with the boys because, as he said himself, he had nothing to do and liked their company; and Penfold to inform them that all the reporters in Sydney were looking for them, a story having gone round that the buyers of the *Cinderella* intended to use her on a filibustering expedition to some German islands. "Of course I knocked the bottom out of the story, and got myself into trouble with our sub-editor by using influence with the chief to get a whole column of hair-raising copy for to-morrow's paper cut out," he said. "I told my colleagues that the buyers were boys, and that they had merely indulged in a piece of speculation, and would probably sell her after repairing and painting her up." He eyed Tom and Richard as he said this, but their faces were expressionless, and he was puzzled, for he had had half a suspicion that there was some truth in the story.

"It's strange how stories get about," laughed Richard after a pause. "I suppose we owe our fame to some of our fellow-passengers of the *China*. We'll have to mount guns on the *Cinderella* if we mean to go in for filibustering."

"I can lay my hands on a couple of quick-firers," spoke Inglis eagerly.

"Thanks," said Richard, "but not having any intention of turning pirates, we won't need them."

There was a shade of what looked like disappointment on the Captain's face for a moment; but Penfold

changed the subject, and soon after, at his invitation, they went out to the theatre.

All next day was occupied in getting their material on board the tug they had chartered, and that evening they attended a concert in the Town Hall. They did nothing during Sunday, for they knew that their strength would be severely taxed before they could obtain another rest.

At daylight on Monday morning they boarded the tug at a jetty near the P. & O. Wharf, and with a couple of barges in tow, steamed out through the Heads and round past Manly to the Naarabeen rocks. The top of one of the *Cinderella's* masts was above water, and anchoring the barges as nearly as possible on either side of the submerged steamer, the boys at once made all connections on their patent diver, and in about two hours after leaving the Circular Quay were ready for work, the crew of the tug looking on in admiring wonder.

Meanwhile, as had been arranged, Penfold and Inglis, who both resided in Manly, the popular suburb by the sea quite near to the spot, rowed out in a dinghy, taking with them a professional diver, whose dress Inglis had placed on the tug on Saturday without saying anything to the boys. When they reached the tug, the crew, superintended by Tom, had erected and swung out large derricks over the sides of the barges and lowered four huge chains therefrom, and were now evidently waiting for the diver.

To their astonishment, however, and also to the surprise of Inglis and Penfold, long ropes, copper wires, and air tubes had been fitted to a large boiler-like contrivance, and the boys appeared to be paying it all the

attention which would have been given to a diving dress with a man inside.

"Hold on, boys, we've brought a diver," sang out Inglis. "You forgot that, but I didn't, and this gentleman is a friend of mine who will not open his mouth even to call an N. S. W. land agent a prevaricator."

"Thank you for your foresight," said Tom, without looking round, "but we did not forget a diver. Thomson is going down now."

"But not in that thing!" cried the diver, springing on to the barge and rushing forward. "That is a death trap."

"Stand back," said Powell, "I am attending here. Stand by the air-pump, boys."

"This is murder!" shouted the professional. "See here, boys, I'll go down for you and it won't cost you a cent."

"Come, boys, be reasonable," cried Penfold. "This is sheer madness."

Thomson was now inside, and the patent diving machine was swung clear of the barge on one of the derrick arms.

"Men!" cried Tom, turning to the crew of the tug, "keep these people back from here, and I will pay you well. A man is going down, and we require to give him all our attention." With that he signed to Richard and Jack, and the windlass barrel ran round rapidly, and the patent diver with its living occupant disappeared from sight in the ocean. A few bubbles rose, and the rope continued to run out, then suddenly it stopped. Powell all the time with the assistance of Inglis, who had run to help him, was working the air-pump.

"Are you all right?" Tom called through the telephone, but no response came, and his usual composure left him for a moment; his face became ashen. The professional diver meanwhile had hurriedly got into his dress, and willing members of the crew had quickly made connections with another pump.

"Haul him up!" he roared to those at the winding gear, but they did not even look round. They were afraid, but they took orders from no one but Tom.

"Speak, David," Tom said again. "Shall we pull you up?"

At that moment the other diver dropped overboard, and Penfold and two of the crew rushed to the winch to wind up what was left of Thomson, despite the boys.

"Stop. If you move another step I'll shoot," cried Tom. "I am responsible for my comrade's life, and I can allow no interference."

"But this is murder," shouted Penfold. "We'll be blamed for allowing it."

"He's all right!" yelled Tom; "he's speaking. Oh!"—he ignored Penfold and the men, and turned again to the telephone—"what went wrong, David?" he asked in a voice quivering with suppressed emotion, and his face in a bath of perspiration.

"Nothing," came the reply. "I was sick, and thought I was dead at first, but I'm better now. It makes you feel awfully dizzy, this diving."

"Can you see the ship?"

"No, everything is black around me. Oh, it is the hull of the boat that rises in front of me—Hullo! here's a big funny sort of fish looking at me; and great Scott! here's a diver Johnny coming over to me—he has no business here."

"That is a friend, never mind him. Can you see the chains?"

"One is beside me. Don't talk for a bit, and I'll sail across and fix it on to the other."

"There," cried Tom triumphantly, "I knew everything would be all right. Haul up your diver. He will only be in the way down below, and the ship will be coming up directly." He wiped the perspiration from his face and smiled at Penfold and the men whom a minute before he had threatened to shoot.

Powell and Inglis still worked the pumps, and Richard and Jack stood by the hauling engine. Down on the bed of the ocean remained Thomson, sublimely indifferent to everything but his own work. The hull of the *Cinderella* lay before him, her stern sunk in drift sand and her prow high up, a large rock amidship on which she rested accounting for this. She was lying on her side, and Thomson could see all kinds of fishes swimming in and out of her portholes and ventilators. The diver beside him was making signals to him, but he could not understand them, and working his mechanical arms he moved himself closer. On seeing him approach in this manner, the diver apparently took fright and signalled to be hauled aloft.

"Where is the other chain?" Thomson asked, laughing to himself, as he saw the other's flight.

"Exactly thirty feet due north from the one beside you," answered Tom, and the matter-of-fact diver at once rowed himself across under the keel of the *Cinderella,* clutching the chain beside him by one of his mechanically contrived hanging appendages and dragging it with him. At Tom's order some of the crew swung out the derrick over which the chain passed, and then

assisted him as far as the crane would reach, and steering by the little compass mounted in front of him, Thomson proceeded until the chain, dropped from the other barge, loomed dimly ahead. The weight of the chain he was carrying became a great drag now, for it was already retarded by the side of the ship, and suspended as he was himself, his small propelling powers were becoming inadequate to contend against the ever-increasing resisting strain. An idea suddenly struck him, however, and laughing at the thought of forgetting his own invention, he caused his longest-hinged appendage to stretch out, then manipulating it by the controlling levers inside, made it swerve round. He then drew it in towards him, and its right-angled hooked end caught the distant chain and brought it too. He next caught both chains in a shorter arm, and lapping one over the other, let them go, with the result that both chain hooks gripped, and connection was thus established right under the *Cinderella's* keel.

"It's done," he spoke through the telephone. "Haul me up and lower me alongside the stern now."

But some one was already attending to the other end of the ship; for the professional diver, having perceived that the boys were not mad, but had a contrivance to aid them which would soon make his profession as simple as tram-car conducting, was eager to be among the first of his kind to help them.

"By the shirt of old Neptune," he had said, when they unscrewed his helmet, "these boys have got hold of a good thing. They mean to connect these chains across underneath her at bow and stern, and then wind her up between the barges, and, by the Commonwealth!

they'll do it. Their equals as engineers don't exist anywhere. Let me down again to give a hand at the stern. The boat is only in ten fathoms."

Penfold smiled as he heard the diver's story. In his mind's eye he saw the floatation of a great salvage company with himself as a director. Just then the patent diver was hauled above the surface.

"Don't take me out," said Thomson through his telephone. "I don't want to get sick again when air-pressure is put on." And dragging his encasement along the side of the barge to the chain dropped near where the *Cinderella's* stern should be, they swung him out on the derrick arm and dropped him down again. When he got below and the sand had settled, he found that the other diver had already crossed to the far chain and was bringing it towards him, but as the stern was almost covered by piled-up sand he was compelled to bring it underneath only a little abaft midship. Thomson at once took advantage of the help given and paddled towards him with the other chain, and connection was made in almost no time. The diver then pointed to the open portholes and made a gesture which even at the bottom of the ocean was easily read, and next instant went flying to the surface, followed by a swarm of inquisitive fish.

"Ask that chap to lower another couple of chains in the right place and come down again," said Thomson. "He's not a bad sort, but how in thunder hasn't he got a telephone connection?"

"He's doing that now," answered Tom. "What are they for?"

"So that we can pass them under when we raise

the stern out of the mud. Our present chains are too near the centre. Tell them to heave away gently on the stern winches."

Tom passed on the order, and willing men sprang to obey, but Powell held up one hand.

"A moment," he cried. "Let some one else come here. I must be at the hauling myself. Thomson is my comrade."

"Right you are, boy," cried Penfold, taking his place at the air-pump, and Powell at once sprang to the huge steam winding-engine and grasped the lever.

"Tell him I am here, and ask him to say when he is ready," he called.

"He's just been asking you to stand by the engine," said Tom, "and he is ready now. Heave away gently."

Powell flung the lever over and the engine started, and all its complicated gear came into whirring motion. The chain rolled itself slowly on the great drum, and all stood by expectantly.

"Stop her!" suddenly cried Tom, and in a flash the engine stopped dead. The other diver had meanwhile dropped overboard again, and in a few minutes Thomson called: "Slacken now till we remove the old chains. We've gripped her right at the screw." He was instantly obeyed, and then came the command, "Haul me up now, and Powell and I will work both winding-engines."

In a minute he was on top, and gasping in the fresh air. "Jupiter! boys, but diving is funny work," he spluttered, for he could not speak. "It is great fun." He did not seem to have enjoyed it nevertheless, but Inglis poured some brandy into his mouth, and he then came round rapidly. "She's a beauty, boys," was all

he said, and then ran to the winches at the bow end of the *Cinderella,* one of the crew taking his place at the corresponding engine on the opposite barge, and another opposite Powell at the stern.

"Haul away at your end first, Powell," cried Thomson, "till we get her hung fair."

Powell and the man opposite him started their engines, and the onlookers held their breath. Slowly the huge drums revolved. There was a jerk or two, and then the rear mast came up until it showed itself above water. Then Thomson and his companion at the winches on the barge opposite started their engines, and the ship rose bodily and faster until both masts were level, and they knew that she was now in a horizontal position.

And still the drums revolved and the wet chains wound themselves upon them. And then the funnel appeared, and a cheer burst from all. The chains creaked, and the winches groaned, and the barges listed heavily to the inside, and while they gazed the top of the deck-house broke the surface of the water. Next moment the ventilators appeared, and then the deck.

"Boys, we can't hold her," cried the chief engineer of the tug in alarm; "we can't keep steam to hold that strain. There's a thousand tons of water in her."

"Keep the utmost pound of pressure on her for ten minutes," cried Thomson, "and we'll be done."

The diver had now come up; he had been "doing something below," he said, and on being taken from his dress at once saw the position of affairs, and with Thomson plunged into the sea and swam towards the *Cinderella.* Next minute they had attached cables to her starboard side, and Powell had connected them with auxili-

ary engines. The tug's engineer, grasping the idea at once, rushed to Powell's assistance, and started the engines, and the *Cinderella* was pulled over in her supporting chains to the port side until the water poured out through her portholes in a series of cataracts. When no more water came, Thomson, the diver, and several of the tug's crew jumped on board with wrenches and closed the ports; the auxiliary engines, at Thomson's signal, now eased off, and the *Cinderella* reeled to a correct position.

"Slacken off the chain," yelled Thomson, standing on her deck. He was obeyed, and then a wild and prolonged cheer burst from every one. The *Cinderella* was floating.

"It's lucky I thought of those sea-cocks," muttered the diver to himself, but Tom and Penfold heard him and understood.

"Captain Inglis, will you take command?" cried Tom, looking towards the yacht.

"With the greatest pleasure in life, my boy," answered Inglis, jumping on board and seizing the wheel. "Right away, lads," he shouted to the tug's people. "To the best anchoring ground in Middle Harbour."

With whistles blowing, crew cheering, and Penfold, the tug's skipper, and engineer almost frantic with delight, the tug started for Middle Harbour, and this time she had three vessels in tow. Never had any one of the company seen or heard of a smarter piece of work, and their admiration of all was unbounded.

Middle Harbour, one of the picturesque arms of Sydney Harbour, was reached in the afternoon; the *Cinderella* was safely anchored, and the tug took every one ashore at Circular Quay. Richard gave the crew

a present of a sovereign per man, and then, with the skipper, the engineer, the diver, Penfold, and Inglis, the five proud partners walked to the hotel for dinner. And it was early next morning before the party broke up. Next day the exploit was ringing through the city, but Penfold had nothing to do with the story.

CHAPTER IV

# The 'Cinderella' Clears Sydney Heads

On Tuesday morning the partners again hired the tug, and with a powerful steam pump on board went out to their property. She lay exactly as they had left her, sunk well over her lines, with the water still in her, but apparently not increasing her burden by leakage; and, pleased that they had secured such a quiet spot for their work of overhauling and refitting, the boys at once set to at that task. Thomson and Powell rigged up the pump on the *Cinderella's* deck, and, with steam supplied from the tug's boilers and led across with piping, proceeded to empty her, the others exploring the vessel as the water went down and finding much to surprise them.

The *Cinderella* was divided into three water-tight compartments, but strangely enough the bulkheads were not closed; and marvelling greatly that such an easy and effective method of keeping the *Cinderella* afloat by shutting the doors and thus limiting any damage to the one compartment affected had not been adopted, they at once closed them, with the assistance of the tug's crew, for the pressure of water behind the heavy iron barriers was greater than they could themselves overcome. When this was done, the pump suction-pipe was dropped into the engine-room division, which was soon drained until the beautiful set of triple expansion en-

gines were uncovered, and the shafting laid bare. The pump was then connected to the stern section, while the tug's pump tackled the fore compartment, and as the *Cinderella* rose higher and higher in the water and showed her clean-cut lines the wonder increased that such a ship should have been so wilfully abandoned.

"Boys, she is driven by oil fuel," cried Powell suddenly. "The very latest patents too!" He had been exploring in the stoke-hole to find out the extent of any damage, and his comrades now rushed down to inspect the arrangement of pipes, jets, and spraying appliances he had discovered.

"This is luck," said Thomson. "We can work her ourselves now without extra help, and if we find timber on the island we can disconnect this system of firing and burn wood in the furnaces for moving about slowly or keeping steam up."

His partners understood little about such matters, but they knew that what Thomson and Powell did not know of matters pertaining to engineering was a diminutive quantity, so they did not trouble themselves much on the matter, and went off again to continue their examinations.

Meanwhile the two engineers busied themselves about the boilers, and found that they were in perfect condition and even contained water.

"Yes, it is quite true about this being another dodge to cheat the insurance companies," remarked Thomson as he traced the oil-supply pipes to their source and found the oil tanks well supplied.

"Have you discovered anything fresh?" asked Powell, who also was wondering what had caused the sinking of the ship.

"Well, it seems to me that the people on board made all preparations before she went down to ensure that no damage would be done. Just look at this gauge. Why, the boilers would have burst if there had been any fire under them when the water came in. They were ready for her to go down."

"Of course," agreed Powell. "They meant to raise her again when they bought her back from the insurance people. Penfold told me this morning that we can sell her for anything up to ten thousand if we like, but she's worth that to ourselves."

"Well, I vote we light up and get some steam in her boilers. We can heat up the engines, and perhaps take a turn or two out of them then, and in any case it will help the place to dry much faster."

Powell agreed, and while Thomson experimented with the furnace oil-feeds he rushed off to clean and lubricate the piston-rods and other working parts of the engines, and thus, just as the pumps drew up the last of the bilge-water in the other compartments the *Cinderella's* propeller began to revolve slowly. Of course she was tied fast to the two barges and well anchored, so could not make headway, but the fact that she was now able to travel at all was the occasion for much cheering among the tug's people and much satisfaction to the partners.

In the afternoon the tug departed and brought back a quantity of stores which Captain Inglis had obtained, and that night when the tug went off it took the two barges in tow, and with them was discarded for good, the partners paying all hands well for the voluntary work they had undertaken.

Next day the boys returned with an army of paint-

ers and labourers and worked until night cleaning, drying, repairing, and painting the inside and outside of the ship. Thursday they occupied in the same way, and installed fresh bedding in the cabins. They slept on board that night, and the next morning took a trial run to the head of Middle Harbour. There was no traffic in these waters except for the leisurely sailings of one or two pleasure craft, and Richard, who it seemed included a knowledge of handling steamers among his accomplishments, had no trouble in guiding the *Cinderella* wherever he wished to take her. Thomson and Powell had no eye for the exquisite scenery which flanked them on the placid waterway; they were down below, one attending to the oil-jets that fed the fires and the other in the engine-room. Tom and Jack divided their time between watching Richard on the bridge and the engineers down in the lower regions, and were highly delighted with everything. It was indeed a new life to them.

They came back to their anchorage early, and fitted up the saloon with electric light. They would have done this before, only the armature of the ship's dynamos had been ruined by the water and had to be sent on shore to some of the Sydney electricians to be rewound. It was brought out to them soon after their return, and when they had fitted it in its place and got the lights all in order they prepared fancy decorations for the saloon table, for they remembered they were giving a dinner that evening.

In the afternoon the men from one of the leading Sydney purveyors came out in a steam launch and took charge of all arrangements for the entertainment, and in the evening the launch went back for

the guests and the partners retired to their cabins to dress. Their work was done exactly as they had calculated it would be, and they were now ready for the next stage.

At seven o'clock the launch puffed up to the lowered gangway of the *Cinderella,* and Captain Inglis in all the dignity of his position as a R. N. R. officer, his friend Captain Seymour, Penfold and his friend Mr. Roderick, the diver, and the skipper and engineer of the tug which had helped them so much came on board.

A faint shadow of smoke hung above the funnel, and the slightest suspicion of a sound like steam blowing off could be heard. As the party stepped on deck the lights were switched on and they saw a ship as smart in appearance as ever had been seen in Sydney Harbour. The partners met them and led them to the grand saloon where another surprise awaited the visitors, for instead of the damp, disagreeable apartment they had expected to find, they saw a brilliantly-lit saloon almost gorgeously furnished and upholstered, with large mirrors on the walls and the woodwork freshly varnished. The table in the centre, too, was set as if for a state banquet, and artistically-arranged electric lamps shown through the beautiful flowers and miniature palm trees from every available position of vantage.

The visitors were speechless with amazement at the wonderful transformation effected in so short a time. Penfold would have liked to ask some questions as to how they had managed it, but he did not know where to begin, and he now felt somewhat awed by the magnificence of his surroundings and concluded that the whole was the result of a strange whim of youths who must be millionaires. He did not guess, and the

partners did not tell him, that they had spent very little indeed upon the furnishings, and that most of it was the original property of the yacht, dried, cleaned, and touched up, while full advantage had been taken of mirrors, flowers, and electric light as aids to effective decoration.

Inglis and Seymour were also very much bewildered, but being world-wanderers endowed with that peculiar nature which thinks it a failing ever to show surprise, they took their places without comment, although Inglis's glance of admiration at the boys conveyed a great deal.

The others, having no reasons for silence and not knowing the nature of the partners so well as Inglis and Penfold, expressed their astonishment and approval at great length; but the gong sounding for dinner put an end to their remarks for the time, and before that function was over they had become so accustomed to surprises that had they been told they were prisoners, and that the *Cinderella* was bound for some South American Republic port with them as hostages from Australia, they would have taken it all as a matter of course.

Some thought of this nature did strike Penfold, who, being gifted with a keen imagination and having heard some more strange rumours of a plot to seize some debatable South Sea island by a filibustering expedition, which could be disowned by the Government if it did not succeed, was so greatly carried away by the abilities of the undemonstrative quintette that he was already forming in his mind how such a plan could be effected by just such a craft as the swift-steaming *Cinderella* and her owners. He was still lost in the

flights of his fancy when a sudden jerk aroused him, and in a moment the vibration which sprung into being, and the sensation of slipping through water, told him that the *Cinderella* had picked up her anchor and was off—to the South Pole for all he knew.

The rhythmic thud of the engines and the churning of the screw grew faster and faster. "By Sydney Harbour! we're trapped!" he shouted springing to his feet and gazing round. There was no one in the saloon. He rushed up the companion-way and out on deck. Then he stopped and lit a cigar, and wiped the perspiration from his face. The boys and their guests were all up on the bridge, laughing and talking in a manner which showed that if they were all filibusters they found much satisfaction in their new rôle.

"Great Pitman!" he exclaimed. "I nearly gave myself away. I've been sleeping, I can see, and these wonderful young men are showing how the ship can travel—and by hocky, she can travel!" He joined the others.

"Hello, Penfold," sang out Captain Inglis, who had the steering-wheel in his hand, "I thought you had gone ashore with the waiters and cooks in the launch."

"Not likely," returned Penfold, "when anything like this was coming. Where are we going?"

"Oh, out for a bit of a cruise. We've got a quick-firer down below, which we'll mount when we get clear of interfering gunboats."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, don't you know? You were dreaming about it when we left you in the saloon, anyhow. I hope you have plenty of pencils and paper with you, for you'll get as much of your confounded copy as you want this trip."

"Then I was right," cried Penfold. "We are filibusters!"

The three boys laughed. Thomson and Powell were on duty below.

"Are you afraid?" queried the skipper of the tug, eyeing the surge flying past with a professional eye.

"No, not exactly," answered the pressman, "but I wish I had got some warning. There is a big interesting article coming out in the *Telegraph* about this ship and its boy owners the first day after I disappear. You see I guessed this business some time ago."

The *Cinderella* was speeding down the main harbour and the many lights of Sydney were far behind. Manly glowed on the port bow, and the lights of Rose Bay suburb shone out on the starboard side. They were now nearing the Heads, and raced past the Manly steamer *Brighton* with the greatest of ease. An outgoing coaster was next passed, and then the Howard Smith Company's *Gabe*.

Out to the open sea they rushed, and the great revolving beacon on South Head flashed across them for a moment and then receded southwards. With a deft turn of the wheel, Inglis threw the steamer round, and she raced away down the coast.

"This is not the way to the islands," said Penfold. "We'll meet all the Melbourne steamers on this course. Why, there is the Orient Liner *Omrah* coming up now!"

"Well, let her come," laughed Seymour. "We'll alter our course when she passes, and then no one will know where we go."

"It's all very interesting," said Penfold, "but we're rather short-handed, aren't we? Or perhaps there's a number of men hidden below till we get clear?"

"See what it is to be a newspaper man," laughed Inglis. "He knows everything by instinct."

"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Penfold," said Tom, "it's all a joke."

"Oh, I'm not alarmed, young man. I rather enjoy this. Of course I will miss the scoop, but I will have something to write about when we get back after seizing the island."

"That is all nonsense," said Tom.

"We may not get back, you know," put in Inglis, "and in any case we're sure to have some gun practice first, for there's a German gunboat running down from Singapore now."

"Oh, that doesn't worry me," laughed Penfold, now resolved to make the best of his position. "I suppose these boys will have some patent up their sleeves or in their vest pockets by which we'll become invisible when there is danger. But what is the matter? We've slowed down."

"Yes," remarked Seymour; "we've got to get back now. I have to take the old *Marboo* out to-morrow for Brisbane, and anyhow it's a bit late."

"You are going back!" cried Penfold. "You don't mean to say you have been joking?"

"Sorry I am to have to say so," said Inglis. "To-morrow I'll be tramping around the shipping offices again, looking for a billet as a cook or maybe a steward."

"Dear me," said Penfold sorrowfully, "and I had an article all planned out for dropping overboard in a bottle to-night."

"Some other time will do, perhaps," said Seymour, and the pressman walked away feeling greatly disappointed.

An hour afterwards they were landed in the *Cinderella's* dinghy at Manly, in time for those who resided in the city to catch the last boat home. As Inglis stepped ashore with a hearty "Good-night then, boys," Tom touched him on the arm. "You might come back when you can get rid of the others," he said. "We'll wait here for you with the dinghy."

"All right, boy," said the Captain kindly. "Anything wrong?"

"No, that is—we have a proposition to make to you."

"I'll be back in five minutes. I'll see these fellows to the end of the jetty so as not to let them know." He ran after the others, and Tom turned to Richard. "I suppose we can risk it?" he said.

"I think so," Richard replied. "He may cut up rough, but we'll take that chance. We need him anyhow, for Powell and Thomson will have to work like niggers in the engine-room and stoke-hole the whole time. How much money have we yet?"

"About four hundred and fifty pounds."

"Then we'll do it. Of course, Tom, you know I am not just sure that we are not going filibustering."

"I don't know how the law of nations regards these matters, but as we are wronging no one we need have no fear."

"Hush! Here comes Inglis."

"Well boys, what can I do for you?" cried the Captain cheerily. "Command me to the utmost."

"That is just what we are going to do," answered Tom. "But come out and sleep on board to-night, and we'll talk there."

The Captain jumped into the dinghy without a

word, and, following him they pushed off. Ten minutes later they stood again on the *Cinderella's* decks; then, stepping to the bridge, Richard rang down "Full speed ahead," and in response the ship glided away towards her old anchorage.

Meanwhile Tom was engaging the Captain in conversation.

"You've sailed a lot in the South Seas, Captain?" he said.

"A good bit, my boy. I don't think there are many islands there I have not seen."

"Does a ship going to, say, the Fiji Islands require papers of identification of any kind?"

"Rather. Every ship that leaves a civilised port must have a sort of a clearance bill, otherwise she might easily turn a pirate, and no one would be able to detect her but for her papers, which she must show should any gunboat demand to see them."

"I see." Tom thought for a moment. "Is it a very difficult matter getting the necessary documents—I mean—could you get them?"

"If I had a ship I could get them exactly five minutes after landing at Circular Quay."

"Can you not get a ship?"

"Not easily. You see there are so many skippers sailing as even third mates now, and unless one has some special influence, one has a very poor chance of getting a command. Not that I care, except that my old mother will miss my money, and I'll go as a blamed pen-pushing purser before she'll suffer."

"How much can you earn in—say six months, Captain?"

"As a skipper on the Australian coast, eighteen

pounds a month, that is a hundred and eight pounds; but as anything else, of course, much less."

"Oh, we are entering Middle Harbour again. Captain Inglis, you know more about us than any other man south of the Equator. We can pay you your six months' salary now. Will you take command of the *Cinderella,* and get all necessary papers for clearing this port to-morrow?"

"Will I? I should just think I would. But do you mean it? Don't joke with a poor beggar down on his luck."

"We are not joking. We can't, although Thomson and the others might. Can you arrange matters so that we can leave Sydney to-morrow night?"

"I can. Where for?"

"Is it necessary to say?"

"Well, it is advisable. Say the name of your most distant port."

Tom and Richard consulted for a moment, and then informed the Captain that Suva in the Fiji Islands would answer their purpose.

"And the name of the owners?" asked the Captain, "or a name to represent them?"

"The Union Exploration Syndicate," said Tom.

"Oh! Well, I must have the name of one of the Syndicate for Board of Trade purposes—that is, if you are British."

"I should just think we are," said Tom; "English, Irish, Scotch, and Welsh, and now we are to have an Australian captain."

"Put down the name of Tom Grenville as representing the Syndicate," said Richard from the bridge; "he is our chief anyway."

Tom began to protest, but the Captain interrupted him.

"Don't worry, sir," he said deferentially, for he was now addressing the Chairman of his Directors; "it just means that you are the one held responsible for the conduct of the ship, and there is not much glory in that. I will get everything settled the first thing in the morning, and then see my mother. I shall be on board at any hour you mention."

"Then here is the money for your six months' services," said Tom. "It is in gold, for we opened no account in Sydney. Report yourself to me here at five in the afternoon."

"Oh, but boys—I couldn't take that—I—I might not come back, you know. You don't know me."

"You'll be here at five, Captain Inglis," said Tom; "and if you can engage one junior officer to assist you, do so. Mr. Preston will be your second."

"All right, sir; I can get my old third. He's a decent fellow, although a bit wild at times, and I can guarantee him. But may I ask, have you thought of everything you require? Is there nothing further I can do?"

"No, I think not. We have arranged everything. I am somewhat troubled, however, on a small matter—that is, we don't want more men on board than we can handle ourselves, yet we almost require a cook of some kind, and at least one steward or general servant."

"I see." The Captain reflected. "You are afraid of something," he suggested, eyeing Tom with half-averted glance.

"We are not afraid of anything; but we must be able to control—by force, if need be."

"I'll do that for you. You surely don't think I will run against you?"

"No, I don't think so, Captain," laughed Tom strangely. "But can you suggest any compromise in the matter that is troubling us?"

"Oh, that is easy. We are British, and will be out of the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth. Have a Chinaman for cook. They are very good as a rule. Then you can get a Jap for general steward, and if you want them, a couple of Kanakas for deck hands. Then you can always boss things as you wish, for those people will never make common cause together, and one good thing about them is that they cost very little. I'll get them for you if you like, and undertake that they will give satisfaction."

"Very well, Captain. Engage them if you think you can pick up such as you suggest."

"Leave that to me, sir. I'll bring them on board to-morrow. Have you everything else on board?"

"Everything, Captain, so now come down and see if we can hunt up some supper, and we'll get to bed."

"Hullo! we're at the anchorage now. Excuse me while I let the anchor go."

But Jack was waiting for that purpose, and the Chairman of Directors of the Syndicate was spared the trouble—not that he would have minded it in the least, for theirs was a compact in which every man would do his utmost, whether he happened to be doing more than the others or not.

Afterwards they all had supper together, and all expressed their pleasure at the prospect of Captain Inglis sailing with them.

"It relieves us of a lot of worry," said Thomson;

"for although Powell and I can manage in the engine-room and stoke-hole, the fellows on top would have their work cut out to navigate and handle the ship."

"Do you two intend to be firemen and engineers combined?" asked the Captain.

"Certainly. We don't want others. Ours is not exactly a pleasure cruise."

"So I understand," smiled the Captain. "But see here, boys—you'll allow me to call you boys to-night, won't you?—to-morrow, of course, I sail under your orders, and will not presume——"

"Captain Inglis," said Tom, "when you know more of us and our object, if you care, then we will ask you to look upon yourself as one of us. Just now we are sailing under sealed orders, so to speak, and——"

"I understand, boys; don't trouble to explain further. I am going with you to attack Berlin if you like, although I don't hold a pilot's certificate for the river Spree. What I was going to say, however, was that you shouldn't make the mistake of trying to do everything yourselves, even if to prevent other perhaps meddlesome people knowing your business. Your time is too valuable to waste upon ordinary labour, especially as one can get niggers to do that. Now, I don't know how your finances are, and it is none of my business, but I do know that I can get some Kanakas or Malays or Lascars to do most of the work, and they don't require much payment. Now, boys, if you would leave the matter to me, and put me ashore anywhere near Circular Quay to-night, I could get them before daylight, for I know their haunts, and I would undertake to pay them myself out of my own salary, if need be."

"But there is no need, Captain," broke in Tom.

"We are not so very hard pressed for funds, and we shall soon recoup ourselves in any case, so if you will engage your own crew as you think best, always remembering that we desire no publicity and already possess engineers and at least one good second officer, you will be putting us under an obligation we shall remember."

"All right, boys; I think I understand. Put me ashore over at the Spit now, and I'll walk up to Mosman and catch the night tram and boat over to the city." The Captain rose, and the boys followed him on deck and lowered the dinghy, and in a few minutes he and Powell had taken their seats therein, Powell of course to bring back the dinghy.

"Sure you have forgotten nothing?" the Captain called from the darkness.

"Nothing," answered Tom.

"Oh, wait a minute," cried Richard. "You might order, or rather procure, a few lengths of dress material at some of the big shops to-morrow."

"Dress material!" laughed all. "Do you intend to make presents to the native ladies we'll see?"

"No; it is a whim of mine, that is all. I'll tell you later, boys. And get anything in the way of ladies' requirements you can think of, Captain. I can spend a hundred pounds on that order personally."

"No, you will not," said Tom. "This is a share-alike Syndicate, and if you know that we require these things the Syndicate will pay for them."

"Boys, I don't know that we'll require them. I only hope we shall, and that hope is what causes me to be here with you."

"Get them, Captain," cried Tom. "Hats, shoes,

hairpins, and ribbons, and some chocolates in fancy boxes."

"All right," cried the Captain, and then the plashing of the oars broke the stillness of night and gradually grew fainter and fainter.

In half-an-hour Powell was back, and then the partners turned in, tired with their day's work and with hopes running high at the thought of starting for the mysterious island on the morrow. When daylight dawned they rose and prepared themselves a hastily cooked breakfast, then while the engineers took a final look round to see that oil, tools, and all appliances were on board, and Jack ran over his list of stores, Tom and Richard went ashore to make a few special purchases. Early in the afternoon a steam launch hailed the *Cinderella,* and on coming alongside the boys beheld a strange assortment of humanity on board that made them wonder where they had all originated.

"Here's your crew," said the man in charge of the launch, "and there's a sovereign to pay. Captain Inglis told me to give you this letter too."

Thomson stood on the gangway and opened the note. "I will be on board at three o'clock," it read. "It is necessary that we get away quickly, as the most improbable stories are about and we may be stopped. I also fear some attempt to harm the *Cinderella* by its former owners, as the insurance people are going to cause trouble with them. Take the crew on board and lock them up somewhere till I come down, and have steam up if possible." There was a postscript which ran: "I have attended to the order for ladies' gear and

have got all necessary papers. Look out for suspicious small craft and don't let them near you."

Thomson paid the launch attendant his sovereign, and the crew came on board and were promptly locked up in one of the larger cabins. He and Powell then set about getting up steam, and Jack paced the deck on the look-out. At two o'clock Tom and Richard came back in the ship's dinghy, and at half-past two Captain Inglis and a boyish-looking companion with a huge pile of trunks and hat-boxes came alongside in another steam launch. Everything was soon hoisted on board, and then Captain Inglis introduced his friend as Fred Stansbury, a New Zealander whom he had known for a long time, and whose father was reputed to be the wealthiest man in the colony.

"Is everything on board?" the Captain suddenly asked, gazing towards the main harbour with what seemed an anxious expression, and on being answered in the affirmative he sprang upon the bridge and signalled "Full speed ahead." "Boys, take Stansbury round and show him the crew; he knows what to do with them," he then said. "And don't let anything happen in the engine-room for want of assistance."

But the engineers required no assistance. Powell had his jets forcing the oil-spray into the furnaces at their utmost capacity, and the steam-gauge indicated a pressure of 200 lbs. per square inch, and Thomson was standing by the starting-valve of the high-pressure engines as cool and collected as if he had never done anything else in his life.

The instant the telegraph bell rang he turned on the steam and with a hiss the piston was driven slowly

out and the complicated machinery sprang into motion, and before the anchor was really up, the water behind was a churning mass of foam. Faster and faster the pistons flew, and the hiss of steam became blended with a continuous muffled sound. The *Cinderella,* gathering momentum with every stroke, fairly leaped through the water, and in an incredibly short space of time gained the main harbour.

"Do you see that big bank of smoke crossing from Farm Cove?" cried the Captain as the *Cinderella* swung round and raced for the Heads.

"Yes; it seems to be issuing from the twin funnels of a gunboat," answered Richard, who stood near by.

"That is so, and she is bursting her boilers to head us off and prevent us leaving the harbour. Luckily she daren't fire. That flag on our mast-head gives us the freedom of the high seas."

And now they crossed the bows of one of the Manly steamers and swept past a huge White Star Liner just beginning its long journey to London. A straight run now lay before them, and the swell of the Great Pacific struck them as they cleared the Heads with port rail almost touching the water. Still the *Cinderella* held on her course towards the open sea, and soon were left behind the white beaten tracks of the Melbourne and homeward-bound steamers, while stretching far to the north could be traced the high-sea route to Brisbane and Queensland ports.

Stansbury soon showed that he knew how to handle a mixed crew, and it was indeed wonderful how he made them go on with their respective duties without comment of any kind. Tom was with him, and took the names of each as they came out of the cabin in

which they had been locked. The little Japanese came first.

"What's your name?" demanded Stansbury in a tone of voice which threatened instant execution.

"Jack Kotay, sir," responded the little man, with a bright smile.

"What can you do?"

"Anything. Cook—wash up—pare potatoes—fight—tell lies and sing."

"You seem all right. Sign your name on this book. You are chief steward."

The Chinaman came out next. "Wha' fo' you keep me fo' so long? My name Ah Sing. I was velly good cook on ship way up Thursday Island."

"All right, John. Get something ready to eat as soon as you can. You'll find the galley somewhere. I haven't seen it myself yet."

Ah Sing smiled serenely and glided away. Then the Kanakas were brought forth and shown their duties; and lastly three fierce-looking specimens of humanity came forward, and one acting as spokesman said, without waiting to be asked: "We Manilla men—good firemen—got discharge from Amurican ship——"

"Then you belong to the engineering department," interrupted the young officer. "You'll find the stokehole down there." The Philippinos departed, laughing to themselves; then Stansbury and Tom went on deck.

The *Cinderella* was still speeding along, rolling in the great swell from rail to rail. Captain Inglis stood on the bridge, a cigar in his mouth, and his eyes fixed far ahead. Sydney Heads were rapidly becoming merged in the horizon, and nothing else was in sight.

"Well, boys," cried the Captain gaily, "we're off anyhow, and we had an escort out."

"What was the meaning of that gunboat following us?" asked Tom.

"I believe a story got about that the *Cinderella* was intended for a modern pirate or something of that sort. I heard from Seymour this morning that steps were to be taken to prevent us leaving, and when, shortly after sending the crew aboard, I was going back to the city on the Manly boat I saw signs that H.M.S. *Pegasus* was getting ready for a cruise, so I investigated a little and found out that she was coming to examine us and other things, and—well—here we are, and I don't think we'll ever see her again until we come back to Sydney."

"How are we heading now, Captain?" asked Tom.

"East-nor'-east, sir. On this course we should see Lord Howe Island, and leave it about twelve miles on our port; Norfolk Island should appear about the same distance to starboard. After I correct the course to-night, we'll run as straight as a rifle-ball to the Fijis."

"Tell me when we reach the hundred and fifty-eighth meridian, will you, Captain? I must go below now and see how we can arrange things so as to relieve Thomson and Powell."

"All right, sir. Lord Howe Island lies almost in that meridian, and if we don't meet any weather we should be off its coast on Monday forenoon."

Tom went below and found Powell in the engine-room. "Where's Thomson?" he asked.

"Turned in to try to get a sleep. He will relieve me to-night sometime."

"But—but who is at the fires?"

"Oh, they are all right. These Manilla men have been at the game before, and Thomson and I have already divided them into watches. Of course we'll take every alternate twelve hours here ourselves, and will always have an eye on the firemen."

Tom went on into the stoke-hole and found one of the Manilla men polishing up some brass gauge-cocks and singing. He stopped as Tom entered, and saluted him respectfully.

"Are you used to this sort of work?" asked Tom, acknowledging the salute.

"Yes, sir. Me fireman on big Amurican ship long time. She no use coal too, same as this."

"Ah, I see. Well, look here, Aquinili, if you do your work well I will give you a lot of money more than your pay. Tell your comrades that, will you?"

"Yes, sir. We all do our best, and hope you become President."

Tom turned to go on deck, and met Jack just coming in. Jack was excited. "Why, what's the matter, Jack," he cried, as they both went up on deck together.

"Oh, set your brains working, Tom, and give me something to do. There's Thomson and Powell working like slaves, and Richard taking his watch on the bridge, and you looking after everything, and here am I doing nothing. I am sure I know enough of engineering to take my turn in the engine-room."

"My dear Jack," said Tom, laying his hand on his comrade's arm, "you know our old compact: every man was to do his utmost, irrespective of what the others might be doing. Now it so happens that Thomson and Powell are doing more than any of us, but they don't object—in fact I am sure they are glad to be able to

show how willing they are, and we all know your turn comes when we get there."

"But when shall we get there, Tom? We are not even going in the right direction yet."

"Don't you worry about that, Jack. Richard relieves the Captain to-night, and when you awake to-morrow morning we shall be heading as straight for that island as other islands in the way will allow."

At that moment Ah Sing appeared beside them, all smiles. "You gen'lemen my bosses?" he asked.

"Yes, Ah Sing, we are," answered Tom. "What is troubling you? Are you sea-sick?"

The *Cinderella* was rolling dreadfully, and there was some reason for Tom's remark, but Ah Sing answered: "No, sa,' cook want know wa' time dinnel is wanted."

"Oh, any time. We are all hungry now."

"Then dinnel will be eeady in ten minutes, sa'. Will I ling gong?"

"All right, Ah Sing. I don't know how you've managed it, but tell the steward and we'll be there."

They went on deck. It was now dark, and a storm seemed working up. All land was out of sight, and the *Cinderella* still pounded on her way east-nor'-east. Suddenly Ah Sing rang a gong he had found somewhere, and leaving the bridge to Stansbury the Captain adjourned with Tom, Richard, and Jack to what their Chinese cook had prepared for them.

To say the least of it, they were surprised, and Kotay's attendance was perfect. No trace of haste or hurry in the preparation of the meal was evident anywhere, and as Kotay glided noiselessly from the saloon to the galley the boys realised that they had acquired at least two good servants.

After the first detachment had finished dinner, Tom relieved Powell, and he and Stansbury and Thomson dined, and then all settled down to dividing their duties in the best way they could. Stansbury relieved Captain Inglis at midnight, and at four in the morning Richard took his place. At eight, the Captain stepped on to the bridge and took the wheel from Richard; but the latter seemed in no hurry to leave, and continued chatting with the Captain until Tom came up and joined them. The swell had now subsided.

"Captain Inglis," said Tom, after exchanging courtesies, "have you ever been among the Solomon Islands?"

The Captain looked at Tom. "Yes," he answered; "I know them fairly well."

"They lie away to the north, I see by the chart."

"Yes; about a week's journey for the *Cinderella*. We'll be among the Fijis in about the same time. I suppose you have some work on hand there?"

"Do you know, Captain, I have an impression that we won't see any of the Fiji Islands this trip."

Both Tom and Richard watched the Captain closely to see the effect of Tom's words, but there was none.

"I have that impression myself," he remarked casually. "But we'll beach this craft on the south corner of Viti Levu, the largest island in the group, if we keep her head as it is now."

"Then suppose you alter the course, Captain."

"I am under your orders, sir."

"Well, a northerly course would fit in more with our ideas. I should like to see the Solomons."

The Captain flung the wheel round, and the ship staggered as if from a mighty blow, and trembled for a

minute as if considering whether to overturn or break in two. But she did neither, and pointing over the stern to the circling track of white foam, the Captain said: "Our course is now north by two degrees east, and you'll see the Solomons a week to-day."

"Thank you, Captain," responded Tom in a relieved voice. "We feared you might object to altering the course."

"Yes, I saw that; and you came up here to depose me if I did, and my chief officer remained to take my place." The Captain spoke drily.

"Not quite all that," said Tom. "You know, we really have an object in view."

"Then if you would give me the position of the spot you wish to get to, it would help your getting there considerably."

"We will. It is one hundred and fifty-eight degrees five minutes east longitude, and four degrees two minutes three seconds south of the line."

"That is farther north than the Solomons extend. In fact it is in the Prince Bismarck group."

"But you are with us, Captain? There is an island there that we very much want to see."

"If it is above water, you will see it," said the Captain grimly. "But may I ask why you didn't take that quick-firer with you?"

"We didn't think we should require it. Our mission is peaceful."

"But it happens to be German territory, and their gunboats have a habit of using all poaching craft for target practice."

The boys' faces fell, and for the first time Tom felt a pang of disappointment. But it was not on ac-

count of the island being German that Tom was troubled chiefly: it was because his great system had received a check. He had not anticipated the fact that the island might belong to any Power, and the whole secret of their successes had hitherto depended on his wonderful foresight and calculation.

Just then Ah Sing sounded his gong, and the Captain said kindly: "Go and get breakfast, boys. The Germans have really no right to the ocean, and that is all that is there—if your positions are correct."

"They are correct," said Tom. "We mean to work the pearl shell deposits."

"And we shall, boy," cried the Captain. "You lifted the *Cinderella,* and by Jupiter we'll lift the island too, if it has gone down. As for the Germans, well, we'll deal with them when they arrive."

The boys went in to breakfast, and Thomson, who had just come off all-night duty, joined them with Jack and Stansbury. Meanwhile the *Cinderella* was speeding northwards on her new course.

## CHAPTER V

# 158° 5′ by 4° 2′ 3″

All day the *Cinderella* held on her northward course, Thomson and Powell relieving each other in the engine-room, and all other watches being kept as they would be on any fully manned steamer. They were far to the east of the usual Queensland coastal traffic, and therefore saw no vessels. By Sunday night Jack and Tom had gained experience enough in the engine-room under Thomson and Powell to be able to take on the regulation four-hours watch between them, and after that the usual four hours on and eight off duty was general throughout the ship, excepting the case of Kotay, the steward, and Ah Sing, the cook.

On Monday morning a large steamer appeared on their starboard bow, and on sighting it Captain Inglis swung the *Cinderella* round to an easterly course. "That is the new turbine steamer *Mahreno,*" he said. "She is on the all red route between Australia and Canada, and can give a present of three or four knots to anything else in the Pacific."

"But why have you altered our course, Captain?" asked Tom, who had just come out of the engine-room.

"Because she'll get into Brisbane this afternoon and will report having passed the *Cinderella.* Now I calculate, young man, that there are some people in Australia just now who would give a good lot to know

where this craft is heading for, and I also fancy that my Directors would much rather that these people did not know."

"You are right, Captain; but won't we be reported just the same?"

"As sure as Australia is the greatest country in this little planet; for we'll speak her shortly, and she'll report us bound for New Caledonia, or the Fijis, all well, and you can bet all the pearl shell we're going to get that Penfold will spread that information, and a lot more, the breadth of Australia. You might go and tell Stansbury to run up: 'Owners on board—please report.' She'll read our name for herself."

Tom departed to rouse Stansbury from his slumbers, but met Richard rushing on deck. His quick ear had detected the peculiar swish of the waters and the alteration in the hum of the engines consequent upon the changing of the course. "What's wrong?" he cried. "Why have we swung round?"

Tom told him, and pointed out the swift *Mahreno* rushing towards them from the nor'-east.

"What! Is that the *Mahreno*?" cried Richard excitedly. "I should like to speak to her."

"I was just going to awaken Stansbury to do so."

"I'll do it. I think I know the signalling officer on board the Canadian flier; and if so, I want to ask a question which perhaps should not be known on board the *Cinderella* any more than need be."

"I didn't know you were skilled in the art of signalling, Richard," said Tom somewhat surprised. "You seem to know everything. Certainly, say what you wish. You are one of ourselves, and know how we stand."

"Stand by then, Tom, and give a hand," said Rich-

ard, running to the flag-locker and returning with an armful of flags which he at once began to attach to the halyards.

"The skipper won't know what I am saying even with his code-book," he laughed, "and anyhow I have hidden it behind the locker. Haul away, Tom. That spells 'report.'"

Tom sent the fluttering signals to the mast-head, and a minute later the other vessel acknowledged it.

"Run up these three now, Tom, the blue one on top. That reads a bit silly if my friend has been transferred." Again the flags opened out in the morning breeze.

"I say, youngsters, what in blazes do you mean by that meaningless string of flags?" cried Captain Inglis from the bridge. "They'll think I've lost my head."

"I beg pardon, sir," said Richard, "it is quite correct according to the code-book."

"Correct be blowed! Do you think I can't read that without the book in my hand? Down with them at once. What in old Neptune's name do you mean by asking the crack steamer of the Pacific, 'Is all right on board?' Thunder! they're answering. I am dashed if I know what——"

On the mast-head of the mail steamer, now almost abeam, two pennons unfolded bearing respectively the letters I and R, and underneath the usual signal, "Who are you?"

"Up with that string, Tom," cried Richard. "Wright is signalling himself. Now hoist these. Ah! Down with the first lot. Run these up now. Good. Now, dip him good-bye."

With a graceful dip the big steamer responded, while

at her mast-head also flew a long line of signals, which, as the distance between the vessels became greater, were replaced by one flag, which remained until the steamers were hull down on the horizon. Before this, however, Tom and Richard were confronted by the angry Captain.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded. "Am I Captain of this ship or not? And if not, then——"

"Don't say anything nasty yet, Captain," said Richard. "I am only one of your officers, and unless Tom clears me when you both hear my story, then you can do with me as you please."

"Do with you as I please! I'll—I'll——"

"Indeed, Captain, I don't think you'll do anything, martinet and all as you are," said Richard. "Listen, and I will explain my seemingly strange conduct. The signals exchanged between us just now were, after the first one requesting them to report us, private; that is, they were unintelligible to every one but the officer on the other ship and myself. A year ago a schoolmate of mine became one of the junior officers on that ship, and he sent me some information which surprised me, to say the least of it. He and I had made a hobby of signalling while at school, for my father owned a famous steam yacht, and we both hoped to sail on her professionally some day. He had become signalling officer before I left England, although I believe he only ranks as fourth, and so when I saw his ship bearing down upon us I could not resist sending him some messages in our own old code, and——"

"Say no more, my boy," interrupted the Captain. "I don't want to put a finger into any man's pie, and you have explained to my satisfaction. I was especially

riled because I fancy myself an adept at signalling, and I couldn't make out what you meant by asking them, 'Is all right on board?'"

"Oh, I can tell you that much, Captain. My friend's name is Alfred Wright, and when he responded with 'I are,' I knew it was my old schoolmate who answered me, even although the grammar was atrocious——"

"Don't tell me another word then until you have talked things over with the Chairman of Directors," said the Captain, going on to the bridge again; "and if you think it doesn't concern me, well—it doesn't."

"Captain Inglis is a thorough gentleman, Tom," said Richard, gazing after him admiringly. "Come aft until I explain some things to you, and then we can decide upon whether or not we shall take the Captain into our confidence."

"But why should there be so much mystery, Richard? We are well able to take care of ourselves, and we are breaking no laws."

"Not yet, partner; but let me tell you a bit of a story, and then some things that are puzzling you just now will be made clear."

"Go ahead, then; but remember I do not wish to know what you would prefer to keep to yourself."

"I will tell you everything, Tom, and, like Thomson, Powell, and Davis, trust to you to bring things right. My father was sole owner of the City Iron Works in Worchester, and my sister Flora and I were brought up amidst all the luxury and refinement that wealth could provide. When I grew old enough to have some sense, I began to take an interest in the works, and soon knew as much as any one about the production of the various kinds of iron and steel. Then my father resolved to

take a cruise round the world in his new steam yacht, and leaving my uncle in charge, with me as assistant manager, he and my sister sailed away. We heard from them regularly from the various ports they touched for some time, but since they left Cooktown in Queensland for a cruise among the islands of the Pacific we have heard nothing, and that is four years ago now. But what is the matter, Tom? Your face is white."

"To be accurate, Richard, the postmark on your last letter from Cooktown is September twenty-first——?"

"Why yes, Tom. How did you know?"

"Because I also received my last letter from my father from Cooktown on that date. He was captain of the *Southern Cross*——"

"My father's yacht!"

"I presume so. His letter to me from 158° 5′ east and 4° 2′ 3″ south, which was picked up in a bottle and forwarded to me from Auckland in New Zealand, was dated three weeks later.

"Then, Tom, our cause is common; we are each looking for our people."

"In a way, yes, but I have little hope of finding them on the island indicated; because if they had been shipwrecked there the letter would have said so, instead of merely giving the information that great pearl shell deposits existed."

"Then let me add my knowledge to yours and see what the result is," cried Richard. "Just about the time I received my last letter my friend, Alf Wright, became one of the junior officers on the Canadian-Australian line of steamers, and on his second run between Sydney and Vancouver his ship picked up some people

drifting about the ocean on a patent collapsible craft bearing the name *Southern Cross.* They said they had encountered a typhoon in which the yacht foundered, and they were carried to Canada, whence they proceeded to Britain. But my friend was not satisfied. He could not get any clear account of how the owner and captain were lost, and was struck with the fact that the castaways appeared to be confused when he casually questioned them, and gave entirely different accounts of the accident. Of course he did not let them know that he was a friend of the son of the owner, and knowing himself that my father had last been heard of from Cooktown in Australia, he naturally wondered what the yacht had been doing meanwhile among the islands. However, to cut the story short, his suspicions were aroused, and he kept a strict watch on the shipwrecked party, and was rewarded one night by overhearing a quarrel between him who had been the chief officer and the individual who had been second engineer. Evidently the engineer was reproaching the officer for having lost some chart, and the other was defending himself by saying that he had committed the position required to memory. The position he gave was 158° 5′ longitude, but my friend did not catch the latitude. Next day he asked the engineer in a general conversation how they had lost their chief engineer, and was told that he had been in the same boat as the skipper, and they had not seen them since. He then inquired casually of the first officer what passage they had taken through the Barrier Reef from Cooktown, and was informed that they had not been at Cooktown. By the time they had arrived at the Canadian terminal port, his suspicions were stronger than ever, and he wrote me in effect what I

have just told you. Since then I have received further proof that something occurred among the islands we are going to that required investigation, and when I tell you that the person who stole your chart that night when I became your fifth partner was the chief officer of the *Southern Cross,* I am sure you will agree with me. Here is his photograph. Wright took a snapshot of the shipwrecked group. That is our first visitor in the middle."

Tom silently took the photograph from his partner's hand and examined it carefully. "You are quite right," he said. "That is the person who stole our chart, and this is Slippery Charlie in the garb of the second engineer, and here is the man who broke through our window; apparently he was a fireman. I don't know the others."

"Well, what do you make of it?"

"That we have more work to do than raise pearl shell, and that we have powerful and unscrupulous enemies, who doubtless are even now on our tracks."

"Which means that you think there was foul play of some kind?"

"It looks like that; but I would rather wait until we get to our island before expressing an opinion. You see, we dare not allow ourselves to become excited. The success of our expedition depends on the coolness of our heads and the unwavering nature of our nerves. If we keep heads and nerves in order we are more than a match for any combination of enemies."

"Very well, Tom, I believe we are, so long as you are directing us," said Richard. "Now just let me explain the signals Wright and I exchanged, and you will know everything. I of course wrote him that I was leaving England for the South Seas when we left,

but he must have been surprised to find me here so soon. Well, anyhow, I told him just now I was looking for my father, and he replied, 'Go north,' and then added a message which read: 'Beware of others. Members of old crew crossed by preceding steamer.' I then answered that we were bound north, but wished to be reported officially as we were heading. He replied that he understood, and wished us good luck. Then when I signalled good-bye he flew the message which we saw last. It read: 'German cruiser doing patrol duty.' And now you know all that I know, although I don't suppose any of us understands the meaning of the last signal."

"I suppose we'll know in time," said Tom. "But it seems to me that your friend meant you to take note of the fact—evidently he deemed it an important one."

"Ah, well, you are Director-in-Chief, so give your orders freely."

"Then turn in and get some sleep; you've been up all night, and we can't afford to have ourselves handicapped in any way. We'll say nothing about our private affairs to the others just now, and let the chief end of our expedition be the mysterious island."

"As you think best," said Richard, going below. "Your interests and mine are the same."

"The day wore on, and the gallant craft, back on her original course, sped northwards. The sea was now as smooth as an island lake, and when night fell the foam rushing from the yacht's bows glowed with phosphorescent fire.

On Tuesday morning there was a marked difference in the temperature, and all not otherwise engaged assisted in erecting awnings to shelter the decks from the increasing heat of the sun. At noon that day they

crossed the Tropic of Capricorn, and far away on their port a shimmering line of surf indicated the farthest outflung strands of the Great Barrier Reef.

"We are in the tropics now, boys," announced Captain Inglis, as he finished taking the sun's altitude and satisfied himself that the 23° 30′ parallel had been left behind. "If our engineers can keep up the present speed, each day will see us five degrees farther north, and we'll be threading the Solomon channels next Sunday."

"The engineers will do their part," said Thomson quietly; "but if it is going to be much hotter than this, we'll have to invent and build a refrigerator."

"We'll get plenty of cool sea-bathing, David," said Jack, "when we begin diving for pearls; and just imagine lying under shady palm trees eating cocoanuts!"

"Wha' fo' you no come along o' tuckel?" interrupted Ah Sing, coming out on deck. "Me ling gong two time alleady."

"Give it another hammering, Ah Sing," advised the Captain, "and we'll be there before any damage is done."

Ah Sing obeyed, and all not on duty went into the dining-saloon.

Next morning, at daybreak, the sea extended unbrokenly as far as they could see, and as the sun crawled up the sky the heat became intense. In the afternoon little patches of glistening surf began to appear around them, and they knew they had reached the zone of coral islands. At night the sea seemed blazing with phosphorescent flashes, and a delightfully cool and refreshing breeze sprang up.

Thursday morning found them on the fifteenth parallel, and night closed in as they touched the twelfth. And so the time passed. On Friday afternoon a low-lying tree-clad island appeared on their starboard, and as they drew nearer the boys could hear the roar of the surf breaking on its gleaming white beach.

"Behold the outpost of the Solomon group," said the Captain. "That is Rennell Island, and just out of sight on our port is the farthest east bit of land belonging to the Louisiade Archipelago. In an hour we'll be among the coral atolls, and if you boys weren't so built up in your own plans I might have advised you to pay some of them a visit, for the lagoons inside one or two that I have seen are simply paved with pearl shell."

"We'll come back later, Captain," said Tom, "but it is our own island we want first."

"Oh, it's your picnic, sir. I wouldn't take in hand to advise you partners for all the gold in Mount Morgan. I suppose you'll be intending to tow your island over into British waters?"

"What! How can we tow an island?"

"Oh, I don't know, but you fel[illegible] seem able to do anything. I am about to alter our course now to get through these atolls looming ahead. There is no charted passage through until we reach the Florida Channel in the Solomons, so I will keep the wheel myself all night. See, there is a big island ahead now; there are thousands of uncharted coral patches all round it."

"Then, sir, is it safe going ahead through the night?"

"Well, it is not a thing I would advise, unless you were heavily insured, under ordinary circumstances; but

I know the water is deep close in to that hill rising in front, and if we can get through the atolls to it before dark I think I can navigate——"

"Why, the sea is covered with islands straight ahead," cried Powell, coming on deck. "What a picture! What a study in colour!"

"Yes," agreed the Captain; "they are very fine. You can rent a dozen or so if you like at your own figure. The British Government will let them cheap."

It was indeed a beautiful piece of colouring that now opened in front. The ocean was a mass of gorgeous tints, and at first sight it was not an easy matter to determine the reason. It soon became apparent, however, that it was the profusion of coral-beached islands that gave to the scene its vivid colour. The islands were scattered everywhere, some extending to a diameter of three miles and others to about two hundred yards. Nearly all were covered with palm trees, and in some cases the waters of great lagoons could be seen shining through their feathery fronds. The water was intensely blue, the beaches of the islands were pink and white, and dazzling clouds of yeasty foam marked where the gentle Pacific swell broke upon them. It seemed a hopeless task to attempt to take a boat through them towards the towering peak that filled the distant background, but Captain Inglis did not hesitate.

"We've got an hour of sunlight yet," he said, "and that should about see us safe. Some of you extraordinary lads might go on to the forecastle and act as lookouts. Shout out when the water is green ahead."

Tom and Jack hastened to comply with the Captain's request, and for the next hour the *Cinderella* zig-zagged among the maze of the islets wherever a waterway

showed clear. The mountain island grew nearer, and its dark, precipitous slopes stood out boldly in the fast-failing sunlight.

"Hadn't we better anchor until morning, Captain?" Tom shouted from the forecastle. "The water is very shallow now. I can see the bottom."

"Never mind that," returned the Captain. "The bottom is a good ten fathoms down at least, and we'll be through the ring directly."

And they were. Suddenly the ocean stretched away in front of the *Cinderella's* bows, sullen and unbroken, until lost in the darkening shadows at the base of the mountain.

"Full speed ahead," rang the engine-room bell, and the yacht shot forward once more.

"Well, boys," said Inglis, signing to Stansbury to take the wheel and coming down on deck, "I don't like to blow my own horn, but I don't think there is another skipper anywhere around the South Seas who could have taken this craft through these mud-banks."

"Mud-banks, Captain? I know you did wonderful work in forcing a passage through these islands, but I did not know they were mud-banks."

"That is only a figure of speech, my boy. They were all coral islands, and any one of them would keep the inhabitants of a fair-sized town in life with only about an hour's work from every man per day."

"Then why do the Governments not send their surplus population here?" asked Jack, who with Tom had now joined the Captain on the midship deck.

"I don't know. I suppose no people would come unless saloon steamers brought them, and a first-class mail ran to and from London twice a week. Some day

there will be a mighty empire among these islands of the south, but as it won't be in our time it doesn't matter to us. I suppose you boys know everything?"

"Oh dear no," answered Tom. "We know almost nothing compared with what might be known. We have had no chance of acquiring any knowledge of the South Seas, for instance."

"Just what I was going to talk about, for if you took away from me the little I do know of the Pacific, you would leave my mind like a duffered gold-mine—that is, barren."

"Fire away then, Captain," said Richard. "Tell us something special about the South Seas. We've all got plenty of room for knowledge."

"Oh, I don't know that I can tell you anything that some other people could not tell you just as well, but I have one or two ideas of my own about things which may be new to you. Now, would you believe that if the water were to be run off this part of the world you would see thousands of church spires and big walls rising from their base—I mean, of course, rocks like spires of a church."

"Is that so, Captain? Then navigation must be dangerous around here," said Tom. "Or perhaps they do not come up to near the surface?"

"Some come above the surface, and a good bit more. Those are what the various European Governments squabble over. The Solomons, New Hebrides, Fijis, New Caledonia, Gilbert, Caroline, Friendly, and hundreds of other groups contain some very large islands, rising to thousands of feet above sea-level; but round them are myriads of smaller spires which don't get their tops out of water at all, although some come

within a few feet of doing so. We could not sail in these waters without scraping the paint off or knocking a hole in the bottom of our craft, were it not that the coral insect or animal, puts a sort of fence round the sunken spires, and builds and builds straight up until the wall reaches the top. That is why most coral islands have a lagoon in their midst, but you may bet that if you went diving you would hit the top of the spire before you went down far. It's on these coral beds that the pearl oyster seems to thrive, and a crowd like this could make a fortune on almost any of those islands we've passed. But there's mighty deep water now right up to the base of that mountain ahead. That is the king of all around here, and it will be some time before the coral band rising from its base gets above water—unless those we've come through really belong to its branch spires."

"What is the name of this big island, Captain?" Tom asked. "It is not named on our chart, and it must be at least fifty miles long."

"Guadalcanar is the only name I know it by. It is about fifty-eight miles long by sixteen across, and the mountain itself is about eight thousand feet high. It is inhabited by the most ferocious savages in the South Seas, and the people who live in the mountains have no dealings with those on the coast, except perhaps at meal times, when the one eats the other.—Ah! Did you see that, boys? Out with all your lights at once. There is some craft lying inshore there, and the less they know of us the better."

Richard sprang to the switchboard, and instantly all was in darkness, the sun having gone down while the Captain was discoursing. At the same moment the Cap-

tain cried to Stansbury on the bridge to telegraph half-speed to the engine-room, and once more the *Cinderella* slowed perceptibly in her onward course.

No one needed to ask any questions. Far ahead, in the gloom at the base of the mountain, the lights of a ship at anchor had just become visible; and as they were far from the beaten track of commerce, it followed that the other ship could not be engaged in ordinary trade.

"Has she seen us, do you think, Richard?" asked Tom anxiously.

"No, I don't think so, or she would not have lit up when she did."

"Then you think she does not wish to be seen any more than we do?"

"Well, Tom, I calculate it is just about time our enemies were putting in an appearance, otherwise they are not gifted with even ordinary intelligence. We have succeeded so far without the slightest set-back, and——"

"I know, Richard, I have been waiting on something too. We couldn't expect to get a free run to our island in face of what we now know."

"I am bothered if I can make out that craft at all," said Captain Inglis, joining them again. Jack, meanwhile, had gone into the engine-room to explain the reason of the slowing down to Thomson. "She is not a gunboat, because all the British squadron were in Sydney Harbour when we left, and the Germans have no right here."

"Can't she be a trader, Captain?" asked Richard.

"There's nothing to trade in there but cannibals," answered the Captain. "No, she isn't trading, because she is a long way off the land. What beats me is why

she is lying at the entrance to Florida Sound, the only channel between this island and Russel Island, through which we must pass too to get through the Solomon group."

"She may be waiting for some other vessel," suggested Tom.

The Captain turned, and although it was dark Tom knew he was looking at him. "I guess you are right," he said. "She's waiting for some other craft; but she didn't leave Sydney after we left, and her owners evidently know that they are watching the only channel leading north too."

"Can we not get past then?" inquired Tom.

"Oh, I don't know about that. The whole question hangs on whether you care much whether they see you or not. They can't stop us from passing, nor can they even follow us if they try. But see here, boys, why are you afraid now? I ordered the lights to be put out because I guessed you would want that; but we're in British waters yet, and I don't quite see how you need to care who sees us so long as it isn't a spying gunboat or some craft able to follow us."

"Nevertheless, Captain, we would rather get past unobserved," said Tom. "We have enemies who are well acquainted with the South Seas, and whose interest, it appears, is to watch us. We do not know that this ship belongs to them, but, on your own showing, she is not a trader, neither is she a gunboat, and she is lying in the last place in the world where any pirate vessel would anchor, to say nothing of the fact that she commands the only channel through the Solomon Islands. I may say, too, that the officer on board the *Mahreno,* who is a friend of ours, signalled that those

whom we have reason to fear are in this part of the world. So now you know everything. What do you advise?"

"Why are they your enemies?"

"Because we alone have the information as to where this pearl island lies, and somehow they fancy they have a claim to it. They tried hard to obtain our secrets before we left England, but we beat them, and I fully expect them to make some great efforts yet to get the better of us."

"I see. Is that all you know?"

"It's all that we partners know, although Richard and I have a suspicion that the people who are following us were also concerned in the disappearance of our parents. Our comrades know nothing of that however, and we should not tell you, were it not that, we believe you are our friend, and might be able to help us should events transpire that will occasion the need of assistance."

"You can trust me straight through, boys, and I would just like to see the people who can run against our combination. But, now that I remember, the people who owned the *Cinderella* were very bitter against you fellows, and the fact that you raised the boat cannot be the entire reason, for they were the instigators of the attempt to keep you from leaving Sydney."

"We don't know them, Captain. They naturally would feel aggrieved."

"Yes, but, by the Great Darling River, that wouldn't make them try to keep you in Sydney. There must have been something behind it all, for their business ought to have been to get you away from port at once. The insurance people were saying nasty things, you

know, and they were in an awkward position with the *Cinderella* floating dry and in first-class condition without any repairs having been made. No, boys, before they would count all the consequences of having duped the insurance companies, which the *Cinderella* herself proves they did, there must have been other reasons which you do not know. At anyrate, Penfold told me a queer yarn before we sailed, and although I only laughed at it then as an attempt to work up a sensational newspaper article, I think now that he had got hold of something. But excuse me, boys, I am forgeting we have to run the blockade." The Captain went on the bridge and gave some instructions to Stansbury, and then rejoined Tom and Richard.

The *Cinderella* had now crept up quite close to the other ship, but they could form no opinion as to her size, as she carried no riding or stern lights, and only the cabin port-hole illuminations were visible. The night was very dark, not a breath of air was in motion, and not a sound save the gentle swish of the waters broke the stillness. The dark timber-clad mountain range rose straight from the ocean right ahead, its form only discernible on the sky-line.

"Boys," said the Captain, "I am going to try and run through without being seen, but I fancy no other skipper would tackle the job as I mean to do it. Don't speak a word, for the air carries sound in a remarkable manner up here. We must pass within a hundred yards of that craft to reach Indispensable Strait, the channel leading to Russel and Malanta Island, so go round and tell every man to be as silent as a mummy."

"But won't they hear the beat of the engines?" cried Tom.

"No; go down in the first place and instruct the engineer on duty to stop her dead, and stand by ready for a sudden call. We're near the current of the channel now and with the headway we've on we should just catch it. Go now."

Tom ran below and delivered the order to Thomson, who had been informed by Jack as to what was taking place, and for the first time since leaving Sydney the engines of the gallant little vessel stopped.

Richard had meanwhile explained to the crew the necessity for complete silence, and then with Stansbury had gone on the forecastle to peer into the darkness, the Captain himself having taken charge on the bridge. So the *Cinderella* drifted onwards with all lights extinguished, and not a sound heralded her approach. Soon the form of the other vessel could be made out by her own lights. She was considerably larger than the *Cinderella,* and looked a very fine ship indeed.

"They are lying in the very middle of the passage," Captain Inglis whispered to Tom, who stood with him on the bridge. "What in thunder is their game, anyhow?"

Slowly the *Cinderella* felt her way on until it seemed as if she must ram the other craft amidship. Then Inglis silently swung her around, she had just sufficient steering way and little more, and she drifted parallel to the mysterious steamer only half a cable's length off.

Some one was playing a banjo on the deck of the other vessel, and evidently several people were sitting near the player in their deck-chairs enjoying the refreshing coolness of the night air, for the aroma of their cigars was borne across to the *Cinderella* and caused Captain Inglis to have a strong desire for a smoke himself. Again the *Cinderella* began to move forward, but her

momentum was now spent, and her motion was almost imperceptible.

"I am almost tempted to ring down 'Full speed,'" whispered the Captain. "If that really is your friend's ship, they've lost us already, for they can't stop us now ——" He ceased abruptly. Some one had spoken on the other deck and the music stopped.

"Did you hear anything?" a voice said in the silence which followed.

"No, there's nothing to hear. Those infernal brats have spoiled your nerves, Charlie. Go and have a whisky and soda," another voice replied, and the listeners waited breathlessly for further conversation.

"By Jupiter!" the first speaker resumed, "if you had been caught on a draftboard-like affair as they got me, and felt the needles running through you, and couldn't move to save yourself, even when you saw the police coming, you might get the accursed beggars on your nerves too."

"Ha! ha! That was as good a joke as ever came my way. It tickles me altogether to imagine the famous—I beg pardon, I mean notorious—Slippery Charlie trapped by a few boys."

"Oh, that's all right, I'll get even with them yet. But you know the *Cinderella's* speed. When could they get here?"

"Not before to-morrow at the very earliest, and that is not allowing for her being handled by boys, with a cashiered skipper like Inglis in charge. I got the wire at Cooktown on Saturday morning, and ours is no slow craft, and as we know the position is one fifty-eight something, and that they must come this way to get there from Sydney, well, here we are waiting for them, and if

we could only make sure of the business I would recommend going for them all, and sinking the *Cinderella* where even their patent diving dress can't lift her. We're not the Twentieth Century Adventurers Unlimited if we don't either kill those boys or make an alliance with them. They are too smart by a long way."

"What about old Preston and Grenville?" the other voice put in; but the *Cinderella* had now drifted out of hearing distance, and neither Tom nor Richard heard the reply.

"Pray that that star over next Sirius has not taken a fit and shifted, boy," said Captain Inglis in Tom's ear; "we are in the channel now, drifting with the current, and that star is our only guide." He swung the *Cinderella* in behind the other craft and she drifted on. Five minutes later Stansbury came aft and reported that the channel lay clear ahead, and the Captain touched the engine-room telegraph. In response a gentle thud, and then another and another followed, and the *Cinderella* was again under way at half speed.

Soon the Captain threw the wheel hard round and a bluff hid the other vessel from view. "Come here, Stansbury," he then called. "Our course is north to Malayta, thence west to one fifty-eight, five, and then call me."

Stansbury took the wheel, and turning to Powell, who was just going on duty, and the other boys, the Captain said: "Well, lads, the infernal brats and the cashiered skipper Inglis have scored on the gang after all. Let us go and have our dinner now. I am hungry, and I am sure you must all be the same. Let her go now, Stansbury."

Stansbury gripped the telegraph handle and the bell

in the engine-room clanged out, "Full speed ahead." Thomson was waiting for the signal, and, as cool as his countrymen have always been in the engine-room, he threw open the steam valves, and the *Cinderella* leaped forward into the darkness. Tom then switched on the lights, and all not on duty went in to dinner.

All night long the *Cinderella* sped through the darkness, and a careful watch was kept to see if the strange ship were following. But there were no signs of her, and when morning came the partners found themselves sailing between two large islands which rose very high out of the water and whose slopes were covered with luxuriant vegetation from shore to summit.

"When we round that point on our starboard we shall have said good-bye to the ocean ruled by the flag that braved a thousand years," said Captain Inglis, who had been on the bridge all night. "That big chunk of land on our port belongs to Kaiser Bill. It is about a hundred miles in length, about an average of fifteen in breadth, and about a mile and a half high in the middle. What Germany does with it no one knows, and what is hidden in those deep gullies and in those mountains I don't suppose will ever be known until Britain gets hold of the group; then the gold prospector from Australia and New Zealand will dance over every foot of it."

At one o'clock in the afternoon they cleared the large island on their port quarter, and went off on a new course to get round some other island which Inglis said was the last of the group. At sundown the same evening they were off a fire-belching peak that rose from the waters like a grim sentinel and cast its lurid light for many miles around.

"We are now on 158° 5′," the Captain announced, "and but for some coral islands have a clear run north. We are just crossing the seventh parallel, and if nothing happens we shall be at your island by the time church bells should be ringing to-morrow."

No one went to sleep that night, and when Sunday morning broke, each scanned the blue sparkling waters eagerly to catch the first glimpse of what they now regarded as their own island. On every side, rings of white surf surrounding a patch of green, with occasionally a gleam of pink showing through, indicated the presence of coral atolls; but directly in front the sea was absolutely free from any bar to their progress, and the boys experienced a strange feeling which, although they would not admit it, was akin to disappointment.

"But it will be low-lying," said Richard, in what he meant to be an encouraging speech; "we shall not be able to see the island until we are just on it."

The rest said nothing. Thomson was in the engine-room and was the only partner not present on the look-out. The day wore on, and even Ah Sing's summons to breakfast was ignored. Suddenly the Captain, who had been taking observations all morning, laid down his sextant, and rang down, "Stop."

"I await your further orders, gentlemen," he then said, joining the boys. "I have brought you to your destination. We are at 158° 5′ east longitude by 4° 2′ 3″ south."

And the blue waters of the Pacific stretched as far as the eye could reach.

## CHAPTER VI

# Some Discoveries

RICHARD took the instrument from the Captain's hands, and after gazing long and earnestly at the sun's image as brought down by the powerful reflectors, he laid it aside and made some calculations. The others, including Thomson, who had just come on deck, looked on in silence.

"Yes," finally announced Richard, "our position is as the Captain says: we are where our island should be."

"Is there no room for doubt?" asked Tom anxiously. "My father could not make a mistake, I am sure."

"I am afraid some one has made a mistake if you were led to expect to find an island here," said the Captain. "There isn't even a coral reef in sight."

Tom's face was very white and he looked vacantly seawards.

"Never mind, partner," said Thomson, "any other island will do us just as well. Let us go back to some of those the Captain knows."

"All my knowledge is at your service, boys," added the Captain kindly. "Only, are you quite sure yourselves that you have the right positions? You couldn't show me the original chart, I suppose?"

"No," said Tom sadly. "We were afraid of it falling into other hands, so we committed the figures to memory and burnt the chart. But the figures were as we have said, one five eight, five, by four, two, three."

"You are sure it was east longitude and south latitude?"

"Yes, the words east and south were written after the figures."

The Captain seemed perplexed. No solution of the mystery presented itself to him, and he did not know what to say to give any hope to his owners. At length a thought struck him. "Your father was a sailor?" he asked. "He wasn't only a gentleman handling his own yacht?"

"My father was the captain, and Mr. Preston, Richard's father, was the owner," returned Tom. "There is no chance that he made any mistake. He was too careful in every way to do that."

"Then you couldn't possibly have made a mistake yourself in your reading of the position?"

"Why, Captain, how could we do that?"

"Well, it's like this. I undertook to be your skipper for the sake of the money I could earn for my old mother, and therefore I have no right to stick my finger into this business any farther than concerns my articles, but if you will allow me for the time to be one of yourselves so that I can speak as I like, I believe we'll get some light concerning this lost island."

"Captain Inglis, we all look upon you as one of ourselves," said Richard. "Every man on this ship has done his utmost for us, and every man will be well rewarded; for although we may not find our island we can easily sell the *Cinderella* for a good sum and——"

"You'll do no such thing, my boy," interrupted the Captain. "Both Stansbury and I will stick to you till we search the whole Pacific, for I know there must be something good about these parts or that gang of wreck-

ers that call themselves the Twentieth Century Adventurers wouldn't be on your tracks so hotly."

"We'll find our island," said Tom quietly. He had now recovered himself somewhat.

"Of course we will," cried Thomson. "We'll just apply our old system of mind concentration, and we'll see the island popping up in front of us, or else run aground on it."

"Oh, by the way," interrupted the Captain, who had been thinking deeply while Thomson was speaking, "are you positive that your figures did not read one five eight, fifty, instead of one five eight, five? See, it would be easy to miss the cipher if it were written this way." The Captain stooped and chalked on the deck the figures 158° 5′ and 158° 50′, and surveyed them intently for a minute as if pleased with his handiwork.

"No, Captain; your first figures are correct, except that the minute sign was absent after the five. The original was like this." Tom took the chalk from the Captain and drew out on the deck 158° 5.

"I'll tell you what that means," broke in Stansbury. "We are twenty-five miles too far west. That reads one five eight, point five, which, of course, means thirty minutes and not five."

Captain Inglis shook his head. "No skipper would write it that way," he said. "But we can prove the matter in a couple of hours. What do you say, boys?"

"As our island is certainly somewhere near here, and we mean to find it, it seems to me that we should see if any misunderstanding of the figures has been made in the first place," said Tom, and all the partners signified that they agreed with him.

"All right, then," cried the Captain briskly. "We'll start right away on our island-seeking cruise. Get to your posts, gentlemen." He stepped on the bridge and rang down "Half speed." Thomson sprang to his post below, and in almost no time the thud of the engines again resounded through the ship, and the water receded swiftly from her stern. The *Cinderella* had swung round while she was drifting, but the Captain brought her back and headed her bows due east in a very short space of time, and rang "Full speed" down to the engine-room.

Once more the surge parted before the gallant vessel, and again the boys gathered in the bows to look out for their island, for somehow the belief had grown upon them that one five eight, point five, was its correct position. An hour passed, then a shout arose from all simutaneously.

"There it is!" cried Jack. "We are running straight down on it."

"It is a high mountain," said Powell. "I see the clouds resting on the top."

Tom and Richard raised their binoculars; but Captain Inglis had already swept the horizon with his telescope, and into its range about fifteen miles distant a mountain was rising from the sea to greet them.

"Well, may I grow into a Chinaman!" he ejaculated. "There is an island sure enough, and it is not on the chart."

A thrill of excitement ran through the whole ship, and even the strangely-mixed crew seemed to be animated, and congregated on the forecastle to discuss matters from their point of view. The partners meanwhile

had brought their glasses to bear on the island, and exclamations of wonder and delight broke from them as its form and nature became more distinct.

"It is an enchanted island," cried Jack; "it looks as if it had stepped out of the Arabian Nights."

"It is a volcano!" exclaimed Powell; "I saw a cloud of smoke burst from that peak in the centre just now."

Tom and Richard did not express their feelings; they wondered if the piece of land shooting up from the sea held any secrets as well as treasure.

Rapidly the *Cinderella* neared the strange island, and soon a ridge of white glistening surf and dense clouds of scintillating spray appeared ahead apparently encircling the mainland, which lay a mile inside.

"A coral reef," explained the Captain in answer to Tom's look of inquiry. "All the islands here are surrounded by them, just the same as were the submerged ones we passed on Friday."

"But how can we get past?" asked Tom, coming aft to the bridge; "we can't go over that barrier."

"Not much, but we'll get through somewhere," answered the Captain. "There are always some breaks in these surfs, and we'll have to look for one." In response to his touch the *Cinderella* made a graceful curve and sailed away in a large circling course to the south, and more features of the island showed themselves as the point of view of the watchers changed. It seemed to be about twelve miles in length, and rose taperingly to a height of about six thousand feet. Great gloomy fissures appeared high up in its sides, above what was apparently the limit of vegetation, but beneath this point nothing could be seen but dense brilliantly-coloured foli-

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PART OF THE PACIFIC OCEAN SHOWING THE POSITION OF THE PEARL ISLAND

age. At length a narrow opening in the surf-bound guarding reef promised means of entrance to the land beyond, and the *Cinderella* was promptly headed for the gateway. Gallantly she approached the cloud of surf and spray, the noise of which boomed like thunder as the reef was neared. A minute more and she had plunged between the portals of boiling foam. The spray fell over her deck, and the roar of the water was deafening; but Captain Inglis knew what he was about, and suddenly the white-capped reef was behind them.

"Why is there such a disturbance there?" inquired Jack, as Stansbury and he came aft drenched with the warm spray. "There is not a ripple on the sea, and yet one would think from that wall of surf that Atlantic rollers were breaking upon the reef."

"It is the long Pacific swell," replied the junior officer. "It is so long and regular that a ship does not feel it, but it is there all the same. It comes from the Atlantic Ocean, and anything that tries to stop it knows all about it. There are millions of horse-power in its movement, and it never ceases. Hullo! there is quite a natural harbour behind that bluff on shore. We'll be safe here, even if a typhoon comes along."

Stansbury was right. As they drew near to the shore at half-speed, and just as the Captain was about to order soundings to be taken, a bay opened out before them, and they sailed towards it.

"There must be a river coming down at the head of that opening," said Inglis to Tom. "I can feel the current now. What a place for a gang of pirates!"

The *Cinderella* now, moving slowly, crept in, and the waterway still lay before them, leading into the heart of the mountain. On either side the narrowing shores rose

gently, thickly clad with palm, acacias, banyan and bread-fruit trees; while birds of gay plumage of the parrot family, startled from their mid-day sleep in the shade of the branches, flew in great chattering clouds over the masts of the *Cinderella.* Suddenly the water ended in a trickling stream which fell from far overhead, and the *Cinderella* was brought to a stop, and moored alongside a coral bank which acted as a natural quay. Looking back, the boys saw that they were hidden from the sea, and, with a shout of joy, Davis, Powell, and Richard sprang ashore. Their long voyage was at an end, and their dream of the past four years had become a reality. So they thought.

"Gentlemen, I congratulate you on your property," said the Captain, addressing them. "I am sorry that we can't very well run up a Union Jack, as Germany already claims everything west of 163° in these latitudes. Still, if you intend to go in for making flying machines or bombs, or to do anything which requires absolute freedom and secrecy, I reckon you have got it here. I suppose I'll soon be out of a job again, though."

"We mean to raise pearl shell, and sell that wherever the best market is," said Tom; "therefore, Captain, there is no fear of your having to find another ship. Your fortune is bound up in ours now, and we certainly do not regret the fact."

"Well, boys," replied the Captain, with just a suspicion of a break in his voice, "I am not much use to any one. There are plenty fellows knocking about who would know better how to help you than I; but this I will say, I like you, and there is no harm will ever come near any of you while unlucky Inglis can stave it off. I —I am not much good speechifying——"

"Then let us get something to eat," cried Tom; "we have had nothing to-day, and Ah Sing is broken-hearted. Come on, Stansbury, don't look downhearted. You are in this thing with us too, and with the help of Providence, which has been with us all along, we'll make enough out of pearl shell to enable you to go home to Melbourne and marry that little girl you told us about."

Tom was certainly in high spirits now, and the combined breakfast and lunch that day was a great success. The partners and Stansbury were eager to set about exploring the island at once, but both Tom and the Captain raised objections.

"It is Sunday," said Tom, "and after having come through so much, we surely can afford to respect that day." The Captain's words were somewhat similar, and the others gave in.

As Tom and Richard reclined in their deck-chairs during the afternoon, sheltered from the vertical rays of the sun by the overhanging branches of the palm-trees, and lulled almost to slumber by the intoxicating nature of the delightfully fragrant breeze which blew down the gully, Kotay came up to them and said, "You goin' to look for shell here, boss?" He looked at Tom as he spoke, and the latter answered with a smile.

"Yes, Kotay, we want a lot of pearl shell. That is what we have come for."

The Jap's eyes beamed with intelligence, but there was also a look of surprise on his mobile face. "Then why you leave place this morning? Plenty shell there. Not much round this island."

"Indeed, how do you know? We have not tried yet. It is out round the beach we expect to find it, you know."

"Oh, I know that, but you'll not find many shell. Kotay watched when coming in an' no see any sea snake. Plenty pearl shell where plenty sea-snake; sea-snake feed on oyster. Plenty sea-snake where we stopped this morning.—Oh, crikey, here's the Captain. You come to me when you want get shell." He ran below, and Captain Inglis approached, dressed in his best uniform.

"What was that rascal troubling you about?" he asked. "I have given orders that none of the crew are to come to you with their grumbles. I am here to attend to them."

"Kotay wasn't grumbling, Captain," laughed Richard. "He was telling Tom some yarn about how you know where there's plenty shell underneath."

"Was he? Then I should advise you to give some heed to what he says. Kotay was chief diver in a lugger up at Thursday Island for a long time, and what he doesn't know of the art of pearling isn't much. That's why I signed him on the *Cinderella*. All the Manillamen are up to the game too."

"But you didn't know we were going pearling when we left Sydney?" said Tom.

"Oh, I had a fair guess it would come round to that. I saw the books you were reading, and I knew the chief use you could make of that diving dress of yours. Besides, I am not exactly a fool, and when you told me you were afraid to have a white crew, because of the prospect of not being able to handle them should occasion arise, I knew that you were not going for a Sunday School excursion, and meant to have something valuable on board which might tempt a white crew. But now that we are here, what are your instructions, and

what am I to do, apart from sailing the ship, to help you?"

"What, Captain, are you asking for orders?" cried Richard.

"I am, sir. At sea I am in command of my ship, but on shore I sail under another skipper, if you will pardon the metaphor."

"Then Tom is skipper now. We all take our orders from him," said Richard, "and a better chief no one ever was under."

"That is all nonsense," laughed Tom; "but, frankly, Captain, I believe I know our plans best, and, with advice from all, hope to carry our work through in the best way."

"Then your commands are——?"

"That to-morrow you will see to the safety of your ship, regarding this island as perhaps being inhabited by savages. You will take from among us all you think necessary for that purpose, and set free all of the crew you don't require. If you can do that readily, then I wish an exploring party to cross that ridge and go south, which you will kindly arrange as you think best; I and another will go north. When we have explored the island, and know whether or not it is peopled, we will then determine our next move at a general council. Am I understood?"

"Perfectly. Your orders shall be obeyed. But I do not think the inhabitants of this place will be savages. They are more likely to be a tribe of half-civilised people from the Florida Islands, who have made this a sort of week-end resort."

"Then you think it is inhabited?"

"Rather. See those wild pigs, and look at that

crowd of half-caste poultry squabbling on shore under that banyan-tree. You never find them where there are no people, for they have to be brought over first themselves."

"Are there any uninhabited islands in the South Seas, Captain?" asked Richard.

"Yes, more than you could count easily; but, then, some of them are just banks of coral, and no one could live on them for want of fresh water. You may safely bet that any little chunk of land around here, with a fresh-water supply, has at least been visited by the hardy native of Ysabel's Island, or maybe from Ndeni in the Santa Cruz group. Why, boys, some of the peoples who hang out in the Pacific have an older civilisation than we have. Look at the Tongan Islanders, and—oh, I beg your pardon, gentlemen, I forgot this was not a school of geographical instruction, and I know so blamed little that I am always airing what I do know."

"Go on, Captain," said Tom. "We are eager to know more of the wonderful people of the South Seas. You can't tire us by giving information. Richard and I are going to visit every one of the islands before we leave this part of the world."

"Then you'll require another lease or two of life, I reckon."

"Perhaps I should not have said all; I meant to say, until we find some clue as to our parents' fate. They were wrecked or taken prisoners somewhere about here, and Richard and I mean to find out all that is to be known about them when we get enough money from the sale of pearl shell to enable us to organise a search."

"Then, boys, Captain Inglis will be with you. I know the islands well. I was brought up among them

on my father's trader, and until he was killed by the natives down at San Christoval I never sailed elsewhere."

The Captain was more talkative than usual that afternoon, and soon the boys had drawn him into telling of some weird and wonderful experiences he had had among the islands. They did not notice the time passing, and by and by the sun went down, and the red glare at the top of the peak shone out against the sky, making the whole island appear to be on fire. Then Ah Sing's gong sounded, and with a start they roused themselves and realised that they were still on the *Cinderella's* deck, and that festive mosquitoes were not pleasant companions.

A watch was set that night, and after assisting to see that everything was in order to guard against a possible surprise, the boys retired to rest, for they were all very much in need of sleep. Tom, however, woke up several times during the night. The novelty of their position seemed to exert a strange influence over him, and he missed the beat of the engines. Once he started up, fancying he saw a face bending over him, but it proved to be, when he became fully awake, only his open port-hole, through which the fiery glow of the volcano far overhead was spasmodically flashing. Then he slept again and dreamed he heard his father calling to him. There was a beautiful girl by his father's side, too, and she seemed to be gazing anxiously seaward as if expecting some one. They appeared to be standing on a coral beach, and some fire-belching peak shed a weird light over the scene. Then other figures came into the picture, and he awoke to find just such a light all around him as had accompanied his dream, and realised that the burning mountain at the base of which

they lay was the cause of his vision. Shortly after, a slight breeze sprang up and blew through his port-hole; the deadly silence of the night was broken by a slight rustling of leaves; then some birds burst into what, doubtless, was intended for their morning song, but really was a series of discordant shrieks.

Tom got up. "It is useless trying to sleep," he said to himself; "my mind seems to people my cabin with all sorts of creatures. I must be suffering from indigestion."

He went on deck. The morning air was cool and fragrant, and the red glow on the mountain-top was dissolving into the light of day. "How beautiful the morning is here!" he thought aloud; "all nature seems refreshed, and ready to stand the intense heat that will follow when the sun rises. And what a night I had, so full of dreadful dreams and visions! Why, I am quoting Clarence in *Richard the Third.* I wish it were morning."

"And so do I, Tom." The speaker was Thomson, who apparently had been on deck for some time. "I could not sleep. I was always starting up thinking something was wrong, because I could not hear the beat of the engines. I think there must be something in the air of this wonderful island that makes me have fancies. That volcano up above has been on my nerves all night, and——"

"Wha' you likee fo' bleakfast?" Ah Sing had glided noiselessly up to them.

"What can you give us?" asked Tom.

"Oh allee samee me. Ham an' egg, chopee, bilds' nests on toast, hen wit' fou' feet? You say; Ah Sing wait, wan' to please."

"Ham and eggs," said Thomson; "but I don't know how you can provide the eggs."

"You waitee see," replied Ah Sing, hurrying away. Then Captain Inglis stepped on deck. "Good-morning, gentlemen," he cried; "you are early risers I see."

"Yes," answered Tom. "We want to see what our island is like before starting to look for its pearl treasure. And, Captain, as we are early up and it would be a pity to waken the others, Thomson and I will have breakfast at once and set out to explore our property. Ah Sing is preparing something to eat now."

"All right, boys. I intend seeing what the south end is like before the day is over, but I—well, no—I don't insist, but I ask you to take a load of responsibility off my mind by taking Kotay with you. I am the oldest man on this ship, you know, and I—well—I——"

"And you are right, Captain," said Tom, "and will be obeyed accordingly. I will go and awake Kotay now."

He rushed away, and in a few minutes reappeared with the little Jap, who was still rubbing his eyes to awake himself fully.

"Kotay," said the Captain, and the little man stood to attention, "you will go with these gentlemen to-day, and attend to them, and see that all come back safely."

"Kotay savy, sir; you depend on him," replied the Jap.

"Then go and get your breakfast and be ready as soon as your masters are," said the Captain; and Kotay disappeared promptly down the companionway.

Half an hour later, fortified by a good breakfast, Tom, Thomson, and Kotay climbed over the side of the ship and stood upon the shore. The sun had just

arisen and the air seemed alive with birds of every description. They each carried revolvers, the Captain had insisted on their doing so, and Kotay had also provided himself with a bag containing the wherewithal for lunch.

"Tom," said the engineer, "you are the chief of this expedition, so lead, and as Bruce said—no, I mean Douglas, Thomson will follow thee or die."

"An' my word, you bet Kotay not be far away too, neither," cried the Jap; and Tom at once plunged into the dense undergrowth followed by his companions.

Half an hour later, Jack, James, and Stansbury were awakened by Ah Sing's gong, and on putting in an appearance in the saloon found that they were the only occupants, the Captain and Richard having left immediately after the first party to explore the south side of the island. The late risers were therefore compelled to remain in charge of the ship, much to their disgust, for they had been anticipating many wonderful adventures that day.

Tom and David found it no easy task to make headway through the matted entanglements of wild vine and other creeping plants which grew between the trees like huge spider-webs. They would have proceeded to cut a passage, but Kotay said he knew a better plan than that, and throwing his slight form against the network he showed that it could be burst through. Allowing Kotay to lead them, they made better progress for a time, but soon the undergrowth became of such a nature that they were continually stumbling among its spreading roots. The two boys in turn relieved the little Jap in forcing a way through the barriers; but suddenly Tom tripped in some rather low-lying creepers, and before

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"THOMSON CAUGHT AT SOME CLINGING VEGETATION AS HE FELL"

his companions could assist him to rise he disappeared from sight under foot. Thomson sprang forward, and next instant felt himself falling through space, and immediately on top of him came Kotay.

Thomson caught at some clinging vegetation as he fell, which unwound itself in his hands, but nevertheless sustained him in his fall considerably, and when he landed in a hard bed of what seemed like rock he was not hurt. Neither was Kotay; he seemed to be made of rubber, and bounced like a ball when he struck bottom, finally coming to rest beside Thomson.

"What has happened?" cried the latter. "Where are we? Where is Tom?"

"Here," cried his comrade's voice close beside him; "I am half-buried in the stuff that came down with me, but otherwise I think I am all right."

Thomson and Kotay at once went to Tom's assistance, and freed him from his clinging attachments, and then they looked round to see the nature of the place into which they had fallen. They were standing upon what appeared to be the hard waterworn bed of a large mountain gully, and in semi-darkness. The sides of the ravine were almost smooth, and rose above them at a steep angle until lost in the thickly-interlaced vegetation which grew across and formed a roof.

"How are we going to get out?" were Thomson's first words.

"We don't want out, David," answered his companion. "Evidently this is the continuation of one of the big fissures we saw in the mountain when out at sea. We thought then that the cracks ended where the zone of vegetation began, but we see now that they don't, and that they run down all the way to the beach,

only covered in, so that we would never have discovered them had we not fallen through, by the creeping undergrowth of the forest."

"Yes, we can see that this is a channel worn by the action of a lava stream which at one time came down this way, and may come again any time, from that peak overhead, and that it is now a waterway to carry off the great rain floods that will wash the island during the rainy season, whenever that is. But how are we to get out?"

"By following this channel until we get to the crest of this hill we are on; there we shall probably find another gully running down the other side to the beach, which will lead us there much faster than we could go by forcing our way through the brushwood on top. But we won't see the island except at the point where we strike the beach."

"Well, it is the beach that concerns us chiefly. We can't see anything more than a yard in front of us on top in any case, and if the country appears to be changing in any way, we can climb out by the aid of some of those fibrous creepers, which we can break down from our roof with stones."

"All right, Tom, go ahead. It is perhaps just as well that we have found roads ready made, for we might fall into some hidden bottomless fissure or tread on some squirming reptile if we continued upstairs, and we can at least see what lies ahead as we travel in this twopenny tube."

Once more the trio moved on, but this time progress was very much easier, as they had a sure foothold and no barriers to impede them. Kotay went ahead, stooping every little distance to pick up some animal or

reptile that had fallen through the leafy roof and had been unable to get out again. The boys wondered why they had not seen those creatures before, but came to the conclusion that that was because some of them dwelt in the world of undergrowths and had scurried away at their approach. Of course, they did not know the names of most of the creatures they saw, but they observed that all tried their best to escape into corners when Kotay went near them. The Jap was certainly not afraid. He seemed to know them all, and commented at length upon some to the edification of his masters.

"I wish we had taken some water with us," said Tom, as he dodged the flapping wings of several excited cockatoos which flew about looking for an opening to the upper world.

"Plenty water soon," said Kotay. "Lot big tracks here all go that way."

"And there seems to be plenty of animals as well as tracks, Kotay," cried Thomson, gingerly stepping over a peculiarly-shaped creature that resembled nothing he had ever seen before.

"Here is a fish, David," cried Tom, "and it's got feet."

"Get out, Tom, how can a fish live on a lava bed?"

"Well, see for yourself. Look at it."

Thomson bent over the scaly object and then uttered an exclamation of surprise. "What sort of country have we found, Tom?" he cried. "It is a fish, and it is walking."

The two boys sat down beside the strange contraversion of nature's laws and watched it closely. Clearly it was walking, at least it was wobbling along on the tips of its fins.

"What you see for laugh at?" inquired Kotay, coming back to Tom and David.

"A fish walking on dry land," said Thomson. "Have you ever seen that before?"

"You bet," replied the little man. "Saw lots of fish on the march up in the Banks Islands. They no' like where they stay, and go away look for another water-hole. This fellow lookin' for water-hole now, no have to look far. Water-hole just here. See all them wriggle fellows making for it."

"Great Piston Rods!" exclaimed Thomson, looking up the gully where Kotay pointed, and springing to his feet, "Kotay is right, Tom, there is a pool of water just ahead, and there's enough different kinds of animals waddling into it to populate a Noah's ark."

In a moment the boys were by the pool. It was simply a basin in the lava bed which had retained by reason of its depth a quantity of the precious fluid which rushed down the ravine during the rainy season. In it and around it were hundreds of crawling things, and converging on the pool from all points were hundreds more. All seemed imbued with the same instinct, and that was to get into the water, where a general battle raged continuously among the occupants to prove the law of the survival of the fittest.

The boys turned away with a shudder; but Kotay kicked some amphibious creatures from his path, and calmly filled a water-bag he produced from somewhere about his person. "Better have a drink, sir," he then said, addressing Tom. "Water good, and not likely any more, for all fellows come down this hole."

The boys were very thirsty, and mastering their repugnance took a drink from Kotay's bag. Then Kotay

refilled it, and they started off again. In about an hour's time they reached the summit of the shoulder they were crossing, and just there the overgrown gully which had served them so well for a roadway joined a much larger one running down the top of the ridge from the great volcanic peak which formed the centre of the island. Here the party climbed up the bank and stood once more amidst the tropical vegetation of the forest. But nothing could be seen. Around and overhead blazed a wealth of foliage and flowering creepers which shut their surroundings from view completely.

"We might as well be down in the underground railway again," remarked Thomson. "We can see nothing here, although I am sure we have climbed to a considerable height."

"You want see much of this place?" queried Kotay, who had been amusing himself by cutting a mass of creepers from the trunk of a tree.

"We just do, Kotay," answered Tom. "Have you any patent which will help us to do so?"

"My word, you bet I have—good patent, too. You climb tree after me an' see all you want from top."

"A brilliant idea, Kotay," cried Tom; "I never thought of that."

Kotay had already swung himself into the vegetation overhead, and the two boys at once followed him. They had no difficulty in raising themselves through the leafy mass, for Kotay broke it before them, and footholds were obtainable anywhere in the creeper stems which wound themselves in endless spirals round the tree. Higher and higher they forced a way, passing into succeeding zones of lighter-coloured foliage as they neared the sunlight. Birds of many varieties the boys had never

seen, or heard of, fluttered about them with incessant chattering, their gay plumages flashing vividly in the chance beams of light which filtered through the top. "This reminds me of Jack and the Beanstalk," said David, shaking some sort of tree-climbing animal from his left foot. "I wonder what we'll find when we get up?"

"We'll find the sun beating upon us in a manner that will make us get down again quickly, I suppose," said Tom. "Hello! Kotay is out. So are we. Oh, look away down there, David! Did you ever see any picture with a colouring equal to that?"

"You mean the beach? I don't see anything else," said the unpoetical Thomson.

"The beach? Why, it is like a large ring of rubies set in a sapphire sea."

"I see smoke away to the south-west; that must be a steamer coming along," interrupted David, balancing himself on a swaying branch.

Tom's poetical flight was instantly arrested. "Where?" he cried. "Oh yes, I see what you mean now, but that is only a cloud on the horizon; I suppose it will grow larger until the sky is covered, and then we'll have a tropical deluge. The time is about due, the Captain told me yesterday. But look, there are the *Cinderella's* masts and the top of her funnel about two miles down from here."

"Yes," said Thomson. "She seems to be lying at the end of the gully we came up, if that really is the course of our roadway we can trace by the dip in the tree tops."

"Why, yes, David, that dip must mark one gully; and here is another decided hollow going down to the

beach on this side; there must be another crack in the mountain going down there. We'll follow it if there is one, and get back round the beach."

"All right," agreed Thomson, watching the distant cloud closely. "We'd better get a look at our pearling grounds as soon as possible." So saying, he began to work his way down the tree; but Tom still retained his position, and mentally made a note of the configuration of the island as seen from his exalted perch. They had evidently reached a point half-way up the mountain which formed the backbone of the island and beneath them stretched a sea of waving foliage running down to the distant coral beach, over which the snowy surf broke perpetually. He also marked the approximate position of the clefts as indicated by the depressions and comparative thinness of the vegetation above them; for nothing grew on the hard lava formations, and consequently their course could be traced on the top. When he descended he found that his companion had already located the fissure leading down the other side of the shoulder; and drawing his attention to the fact that the fork was formed just at that point by the greater cleft, which came down from the mountain-top, splitting in two and thus taking the shape of a great inverted Y, one leg of which ran down each side of the shoulder, he took their bearings with a compass, and followed Thomson and Kotay down the second gully. This one stretched away from their feet in a straight unbroken tunnel until its form became lost in the distant gloom. It was delightfully cool in the strange passage, and a current of air blowing through refreshed them greatly after their roasting experience at the tree-tops. Thomson started running down the long sloping path, and

Tom and Kotay followed his example. Thus they arrived at what seemed to be the foot of the hill in a very short space of time, and found themselves confronted by a dense mass of interlaced vegetation which walled them in.

"I hear the boom of the surf now," said Tom. "This must be the end of our tunnel. Let us cut our way out."

But Kotay had already burst through, and in another minute the three stood on the open beach admiring the beautiful border of white shells which fringed the coral all round the shore.

"This is glorious!" cried Thomson. "Who votes for a swim to see if we can locate any pearl-shell beds?"

"No, no!" cried Kotay, "plenty shark about here. They hungry, too."

"Oh, bother the sharks, I'm going in," returned Thomson, and Tom looked as if he also would have enjoyed a swim in the sparkling waters.

"All right, then," said Kotay, plunging in, clothes and all, "you come now. Shark no touch white man when nigger or any other kind of fellow about."

"How will they know the difference without tasting?" asked Tom; but the Jap was already diving in search of shell, and did not hear Tom's question, and discarding their boots only the two boys plunged in beside him.

"I see a large pearl shell," cried Thomson, and he dived and brought up a fine specimen about nine inches in diameter.

"Here's another," cried his companion, holding aloft one equally splendid.

"Oh, lots of that kind shell here," said Kotay contemptuously, standing up and looking at the shells the boys held in their hands. "Them no good. This is the fellow you want. Maybe pearl in him, but not in yours." He dived again and came up with two shells, which he handed to David and Tom. "You see this mark on outside shell?" he continued, pointing out some concentric lines on one side of the casing; "that is where he rolls little piece of sand until he grow into big pearl. No see this mark, no find any pearl."

"Then you think pearls grow from sand?" said Tom, dropping into the water again.

"You bet. Oyster shake sand about because sand is no like much by him; he no able to get him out, so he covers him, and covers him with the stuff he makes his shell until he grow into big pearl."

"How do you know?" asked Thomson.

"Because I have been pearl-diver long time and watched. The Chinkies put little piece of sand into oyster and then put shell back on good bed until he makes a pearl, then they take him up and take pearl out."

"The Chinkies?" cried the boys. "Who are the Chinkies?"

"You not know that?" Kotay's astonishment was great. "Why, Chinamen, of course. Ah Sing is a Chinkie or Chow. He blame good pearler all the same."

"Thanks, Kotay, for your information," said Tom, "but I understood you to say yesterday that there wasn't much pearl shell here."

"No, there no much shell here. One, two, three shell no good to fill a ship. Must find shell fast as can

pick them up. When you go back where we stopped yesterday, plenty shell there, plenty sea-snake, water not deep there, think there must be a bank not far down—— Look out! Shark!" Kotay dived and disappeared, and looking round the boys saw a huge shark rushing swiftly towards them. Only its brown triangular fin was visible above the surface, but the water was so clear that its enormous body was quite easily distinguishable. With one accord the boys made for the shore, and the ugly creature turned on its back and came at them. But it had evidently made a miscalculation as to the proximity of the shore, for while it was still a good distance from Thomson, who was the nearer of the two, it grounded itself and lay helpless and splashing half-way out upon the beach. Just then Kotay came up from behind with his long knife in his teeth, and before Tom or David knew what was happening the water around assumed a dark purple tinge and the shark was lifeless.

"Some sharks very silly," remarked Kotay, wiping the knife upon its palpitating body; "he was big enough to know that Kotay killed lots of his brothers in Torres Strait. You like a tooth from him to hang on watch-chain?"

"No, no, Kotay," cried the boys. "And what can we do with the brute? Its carcass decomposing will cause a smell all over the island, for there is no tide to rise and carry the thing away."

"Oh, we can burn him by an' by, or pull him out to sea an' other fellow-sharks soon eat him up," said Kotay, smiling. "Big shark this."

Probably the party would have proceeded to carry out one of these plans at once, but Thomson, who had

been looking at something among the trees farther along the shore, suddenly exclaimed, "I see a house!" and for the moment the shark was forgotten, and the other two looked where he pointed. It was a house sure enough, and getting into their boots the party walked towards it. When they came near they saw that it was cunningly hidden among the trees, and was visible from no other point than that from which they had first seen it. It was strongly built of rough timber, and had a barred space let into its walls for a window. No one responded to their summons at the door, and wondering whether they could be taken up for house-breaking or not the boys and Kotay climbed through the bars across the window and dropped inside.

## CHAPTER VII

# Gentlemen of the Twentieth Century Adventures

To say that the three house-breakers were surprised when they looked around them would certainly be true, but it would be a very poor way of expressing their feelings. None of them spoke for some time; each was trying to understand what he saw, and explain to himself the reason of everything. They were in a long, low compartment half constructed of wood and half excavated from the rocks behind. Piles of boxes containing condensed milk, compressed beef, jams, and many other commodities filled one end of the place and gave it a resemblance to a depôt for shipwrecked mariners; but modern artillery, consisting of twelve-pounders, pom-poms, and 4-7 guns were stored lavishly in the other end, and surely no unfortunate castaways had need of such engines of destruction. Compasses, theodolites, sextants, patent logs, rifles, and other instruments also found a place, and several pianos, three organs, one harmonium, and two or three dozen smaller musical instruments were in evidence.

"It looks like a Government store of some kind," said Thomson at length, endeavouring to speak as though he had been accustomed to situations like their present one all his life.

"It would be officially marked if it were," said Tom; "and in any case I don't think that even the German Government provides musical instruments for its shipwrecked subjects."

Tom spoke coolly, yet all the time he was revolving in his mind the fact that the message from his father had come from where they were.

"Here am a book like one on the *Cinderella,*" cried Kotay, who had been wandering in the recesses cut into the rocks behind. Tom moved forward. "Great Powers!" he cried, "it has the name of my father's ship printed on it."

"What does it all mean, Tom?" asked his comrade.

"I don't know, David. We are near the solution of a mystery, but——"

A noise like the grating of a boat's keel on the beach made him pause, and at that moment Kotay, who had run to the window, exclaimed, "Here is a boat with five—six white men, and a big steamer is outside the reef!"

The boys ran to the window. "That is the steamer we passed in the Florida Channel," cried Thomson excitedly, "and it was its smoke I saw after all."

"And there is Slippery Charlie among those people in the boat just beached," added Tom, also excited, although he tried to be calm.

"My word! but we fellows should not be here," said Kotay.

"We can't get out now without them seeing us," spoke Tom. "This must be their depôt."

"Then let us hide behind those boxes and hear what they have to say," said Thomson, recovering his coolness with surprising rapidity; "they have only

come ashore in a dinghy, and can't wait here all day."

For a moment Tom hesitated.

"Come on," cried his comrade; "they will murder us if they find us here, and we can't get out."

"I know," said Tom; "I was only wondering if we should not hold this place against them. We have guns and ammunition here, and they have none."

"My word!" said Kotay, "white fellows often fools. If them other fellows come after you, why you not hide here and know what they mean to do. Then you can shoot them from behind boxes, or wait till they get drunk, and then clear out."

"They are at the door now," whispered David, pulling Tom down with him behind a pile of preserved fruit cases.

Kotay seized an armful of weapons and dropped beside them, and they had not been in this position a fraction of a minute when the door was opened and five men strode into the apartment and seated themselves upon boxes which they drew down from their places.

"Gentlemen of the Twentieth Century Adventurers," said one, a medium-sized, middle-aged man of distinguished appearance and a German accent, "this is our headquarters, as you know, and we have come here to discuss some matters of great importance to our Company, not to mention ourselves."

"I am a stickler for form," drawled a dandified sort of individual of somewhat youthful appearance. "Er—suppose you read the minutes of the last meeting, just to let us know when and where it occurred, if nothing more."

"I second that suggestion," cried the man whom the

boys recognized as Slippery Charlie. "I don't think I was there."

"No; you were awaiting trial at the time," laughed another, lighting a cigar. "It was just after those boys did you so neatly."

"You might forget that incident," suggested he whom the partners had trapped at home, with a trace of irritation in his voice. "It is a bit stale now, and anyhow it seems that that affair was after all of greater importance than the Syndicate thought, and I was rushed into it without any warning as to the calibre of the so-called boys."

"I back Charlie," interrupted the remaining man, and the boys at once knew that the individual who had stolen their chart was before them.

"Very well, gentlemen," said the first speaker. "Cease this twitting one another for work not successfully accomplished. Our profession is one in which we must take enormous risks, and we cannot reasonably expect always to succeed. We must therefore take our failures philosophically and harbour no personal animosity against those who beat us for the time, nor reproach any of our members who have not succeeded in what may have been almost an impossible adventure. Our duty remains the same, and as operative members of the greatest and most world-embracing organization of modern times, we must view things in a manner worthy of ourselves. I will now read the minutes of the last meeting of the General Council; it took place in London, but I believe many sub-committees have met since then in various parts of the world, of which we may or may not have some knowledge. The following are the minutes, gentlemen, relating to the Pacific Section, which is all

that concerns us." The President produced a paper, and after scrutinising it carefully as if to find the proper place, read :—

"Submitted by members 14 and 15 that the *Cinderella* had been sunk as per command, and further instructions were awaited. *Second.* Submitted by the British department that a party of boys had invented some appliances which would, if given to the public, materially affect our enterprises. *Third.* Reported by the Pacific Committee that their search for the pearl shell island discovered by Captain Grenville of the *Southern Cross* was still without result. *Fourth.* Intimated that the French Insurance Offices had paid the money for the *La Belle,* purchased under pressure and sunk outside Noumea, and that the American courts had awarded full salvage rates for the *Texas King* which was towed into San Francisco by one of our craft after having been abandoned by her crew as per usual. *Fifth.* Requested that a sufficient sum be paid into the Bank of Australasia at Sydney to meet the expenses of a raid upon the New Hebrides.

"In connection with the foregoing the Council resolved as follows:—*First.* To allow the Insurance Company to put the sunken *Cinderella* up for sale, and then buy her back, taking care to cause a report to be made public that she lies in water too deep to be raised. *Second.* To find out all about the Worchester boys and their inventions, and how they proposed to apply them. If need be then to buy or otherwise acquire the inventions, or place the boys in a position where they could cause no harm. *Third.* To send out the available members of the old crew of the *Southern Cross,* and if they could not find the island, to take steps to compel

the owner or captain to disclose its position. *Fourth.* To enter the same in the books. *Fifth.* To send the money required."

The President of the Pacific Section of the Twentieth Century Adventurers laid down his paper and looked round.

"That is all, gentlemen," he said; "and as, according to rule, each section must adopt or reject that which applies to its special work at its first committee meeting, all of the above which concerns us has now been in force for some time."

"I understand that since then we, as the Pacific Section, have had a meeting?" said the person who had first suggested that the Chairman should go over what had passed at the general meeting in London.

"Yes," answered the dignified-looking man; "the first, second, and third clauses there resolved themselves, with quite a dramatic suddenness, into one, and having full power in our own department we acted accordingly."

"Ah yes," drawled the questioner reflectively, blowing a cloud of cigar smoke into the air and watching it float upwards. "You are quite correct, Herr Buelon, and you put the matter very plainly. All the Pacific Section's business seems to have become centred on what at first looked hardly worth our attention. The greatest organisation of modern times, as you term our society, has indeed met with its first serious opposition." The speaker paused languidly, and blew more smoke into the air.

"Do you think that the Insurance people will cause more than the usual trouble over the *Cinderella* affair?" asked Slippery Charlie.

"Oh no; I wasn't thinking of them. They simply

do not pay the money, and there the matter will end so far as they are concerned."

"Then surely you don't think we can't find that mysterious island?" said the man who had stolen the chart.

"We'll get on the track of those confounded boys sooner or later, Sir Robert, and the rest will be a simple matter," added the fourth member of the group.

"Will it?" said he thus addressed as Sir Robert lazily. "Now, do you know, Crosswood, I rather fancy we'll have no trouble about finding those boys. My fear is that they will find us. It is those boys themselves that I put down as the chief factor in our opposition. Just think how they have burst into our schemes, like—like——"

"Like lambs into a lion's den," laughed the chart-stealer. "We'll soon stop their brilliant career——"

Sir Robert took his cigar from his mouth and looked curiously at the last speaker. "I think you are talking like a first-class fool, Bankstone," he said. "Do you imagine for one moment that we can so easily dispose of a combination, youthful or not, that beat both you and Charlie in Worchester, and then baffled the best men we had at home, and cleared out without so much as one of our fellows with them for Australia?"

"We are in the South Seas now," said Bankstone significantly.

"—And who immediately on landing ran full tilt against our local branch, and bought, raised, manned, and sailed the *Cinderella* before our people in Sydney knew whom they had to deal with."

"I don't think the people who raised the *Cinderella* meant to measure their strength with ours when they

bought the *Cinderella,*" said Herr Buelon. "They couldn't have known of our existence, or they would have simply published their knowledge in the papers."

"No one would believe them," said Slippery Charlie. "Who would listen to such an absurd story as the facts about our society would appear to be? No one in his senses would believe that a syndicate of adventurers whose influence reached the whole world round, and whose exploits in the way of wrecking and filibustering had realised millions, could exist in these days of swift cruisers, cables, and Marconigrams, to say nothing of long-range guns. No, gentlemen, the boys knew better than to give themselves away—that is, if they did happen to know anything about us, which I can scarcely credit, for how could they get their information?"

"Then how do you explain the fact that they knew the position of our island?" asked Sir Robert. "It seems to me that, leaving alone the question of how much they really know of us, they know of the island, and their actions prove that they are quite prepared for powerful opposition, and believe they can win."

"I doubt if they knew of any special island," said Banks' one. "There was absolutely nothing marked on their chart, and the cables received at Cooktown said the *Mahreno* passed the *Cinderella* bound east, which could only mean that she was making for New Caledonia, the Fijis, or the eastern Pacific, and we know the island is not in that direction."

"Perhaps not," said Sir Robert. "Still, I'll go a thousand that the boys find it. By the way, there is an animal of some kind behind those boxes. I can hear it breathing."

"Wild cat, probably," said Crosswood. "This island is swarming with them."

"Let us to business, then, gentlemen," cried the Chairman. "What have we to do with wild cats, unless they happen to be fictitious gold-mines? The *Cinderella* did not come through Indispensable Strait, for we were there awaiting her, and it therefore follows that she has gone farther east. But let us dismiss her from our thoughts and see if we can't discover the island for ourselves. We know it is somewhere south of the line, on the meridian of one hundred and fifty-eight degrees, five minutes."

"And we have sailed that meridian," said Crosswood, "from the Solomons to the equator and found nothing. This is the only island near the supposed position. It lies in one hundred and fifty-eight degrees thirty minutes, but there is not enough shell round its beaches to keep half-a-dozen beach-combers working."

"And are you quite certain that there ever was such an island, and that its shell deposits were so great?" inquired Sir Robert.

"There is no doubt about that. Captain Grenville seemed to have known of it before, and sailed straight to it. Preston, the owner of the *Southern Cross,* and he were to work it between them, whether they could get a concession from the Germans or not. I saw some of the shells which a Manilla diver on board brought up, and I certainly never saw their equal in size before. It was then about time to act for the Syndicate, so next morning we disposed of those who stood in our way, the chief engineer sticking to Captain Grenville and Mr. Preston. After that we hid the ship, scattered some wreckage in the track of the Canadian-

Australian line, and got ourselves picked up as shipwrecked mariners. You know the rest. Grenville had not marked the latitude on his chart, and I could only guess at it; but the fact remains that we have never found it, and we have had our base established here for the last four years."

"But it does exist?" The speaker was Sir Robert.

"I saw it," returned Crosswood. "It was an extremely low-lying coral island about a mile and a half in diameter, with a lagoon which occupied about three-quarters of its area. There was no vegetation upon it, and its surface was covered with guano deposits, but around its shores lay the largest pearl beds I have ever known."

"It seems to me that this island is worth more to us than anything else on our programme just now," remarked the Chairman. "And as we are assured it is something more tangible than a dream——."

"Crosswood never dreamt in his life," laughed Slippery Charlie. "He is too thoroughly practical."

"—We must find it," continued Herr Buelon. "Therefore we will take stores on board and sail east and west in parallel courses from the fifth degree of latitude, north to the line. If we can't find it by that method, then I fear we shall have to depart from our rule somewhat, and use some kind of persuasion to induce Captain Grenville—— Dear me! I am sure I heard something that was not a wild cat behind those cases. Go and see what it is, some one."

"I shouldn't wonder if those marvellous boys we've heard so much of were there," said Bankstone sarcastically. "Perhaps they dropped from a flying-machine, and knowing we were coming here to hold a meeting,

free from possible eavesdroppers on board, hid behind those boxes to hear what we had to say."

"Then why don't you go and see?" suggested Sir Robert. "I would if I were afraid. But not being in a state of nerves, and this desirable storeroom smelling a trifle of—well—many things, I am going out to have a look round this little piece of Pacific Paradise which we have defiled by our presence."

"I want a breath of fresh air too," said Herr Buelon. "That odour of—of—I don't know what, has become simply unbearable these last few minutes."

"Whew!" ejaculated Slippery Charlie, running to the door. "Even smelliferous Jerusalem is nothing to this. What on earth is the meaning of it?"

"Decomposing wild cats, I suppose," said Bankstone, who had been turning over some of the boxes. "By Jemimah! but it is powerful, and is getting worse."

"Don't stir it up any more just now then," said Herr Buelon. "Let us get outside. We can send over some men to overhaul the place and—oh——" He rushed from the apartment, and the others hurriedly followed him. Then the two boys and Kotay rose from their cramped position and looked at each other.

"Kotay no understand everything," spoke the latter, "but I think it time we no be here."

"I agree with you," said Tom, "but how are we to get away?"

"Get outside and run for it," suggested Thomson. "We can surely run faster than they."

"And be shot before we had gone very far," said Tom. "But we can't stay here in any case. That smell is fearful, and the crew of the yacht will be over here some time to-day to investigate the cause of it."

"I'll tell you," burst in Thomson, who had walked cautiously to the barred window space. "They've all gone along the shore to the right. Why should we not rush their boat? It is beached only a hundred yards away. We could then pull round to our own harbour, and they would have to follow us around the beach or get another boat from the ship."

"And then they would know all about us," said Tom, "and most probably come round and seize the *Cinderella* and kill us all, or at least maroon us on some desolate spot where we should never be heard of again. No, David. We have unknowingly run against an enormously powerful secret society that evidently has branches all over the world, and we must take extreme care of ourselves just now, for on us depend the lives of many people, among whom, as you heard, are my father and possibly also Mr. Preston."

"Other fellows have gone round corner," said Kotay, who had crawled along the side of the house to see where the men went. "We can clear now. My word!"

"Yes, I believe we can," agreed Tom, looking out carefully. "They are out of sight now on our right, and if we can only gain the shelter of the undergrowth we are safe."

"Then let us make a break for it," cried Thomson. "They may come back any minute."

"Come then. Keep close into the walls until we see whether we shall be observed or not, and then run for the nearest scrub—— But wait a minute. They have a large supply of very fine revolvers here. Probably they stole them, so I see no reason why we shouldn't have one each—we may need them."

"I've got my pockets filled already," said Kotay. "Thought you might want shooters."

"Then I'll have a good one for myself," said Thomson, running back into the house, "and Kotay's lot will help to give us an armoury on the *Cinderella.*" He came back in less than a minute, and the trio went out through the open doorway.

"That smell inside is not nearly so bad now," Thomson remarked as Kotay crawled round the end of the house to see if the coast was clear.

"Not very likely," answered the Jap, overhearing the question. "I stopy up tin again."

"What do you mean, Kotay?" asked Tom, as the little man stood upright and signalled that all was clear.

"Oh, Kotay think them fellows stay too long, so I job my knife into tin of cabbage I could see through box. Him make them clear out quick and lively, you bet—tinned cabbage make fine smell when let out. But other fellows away now. We can git."

"Then git!" said Tom. "Make for that dense part beside that palm tree."

And they did. Kotay was the first to reach the welcome shelter of the timber, and was leisurely filling a very old and dilapidated pipe when the boys arrived.

"Have drink from water-bag, an' here one biscuit I stole," he remarked, unslinging his water-bag and producing a handful of biscuits.

"Kotay, you are a wonder!" exclaimed Thomson. "I am both hungry and thirsty." And Tom also expressed his approval of Kotay's little theft.

Five minutes later they were skirting the vegetation towards the gully through which they had come down, and suddenly the huge shark they had killed burst into view, a cloud of birds hovering near it.

"Oh, that will give us away!" exclaimed Tom.

"When they see that shark they will know that someone is on the island besides themselves."

"No blooming fear," rejoined Kotay, whose English, although wonderfully good, comprised many slang terms. "Them fellow-birds will have him eat up soon, and dead shark smell a lot badder than tinned cabbage anyhow. Other fellows no come along o' smell like what him be to-morrow."

This knowledge was partly reassuring, and the trio passed on and soon broke into the semi-underground passage. Once inside the cool shelter of the covered gully, the boys breathed freely for the first time since knowing that they were not alone on the island. They had not yet spoken of what they had heard nor of what they thought, any more than the few words before leaving the storehouse, nor did they seem inclined to do so now. Each was trying to piece things together in his own way, and as yet the full purport of what they had heard had not dawned upon them.

"Let us run, boys," cried Tom. "The sooner we let Captain Inglis know what we have heard the better it will be for ourselves. I say, David, I never felt so glad before that we have such a man as Inglis with us. He will know at once what to do, and we'll best these professional wreckers, or pirates, or whatever they like to call themselves, yet."

"But, Tom, it seems we haven't found our island after all," said Thomson as they ran. "This is not it, according to Kotay and that fellow Crosswood."

"We'll have to leave it all to Captain Inglis, David. It all seems beyond my comprehension at present. When we get together we'll reason the thing out. One thing I feel certain of now is that Richard's father and my

father are alive somewhere, and probably Richard's sister and their chief engineer as well. Another thing we now know too is that our island does exist somewhere, and the whole matter is reduced to the question—Who will find it first? I am sorry now we didn't bring along that quick-firing gun Captain Inglis spoke of. We may have some fighting before long."

"Then all the more fun, Tom. We can sail round inside the outer reef and take all sorts of fighting machinery from that treasure trove we have just left."

But it was a different matter running up the hill, even although in a tunnel, from what it was coming down, and the boys found they were unable to sustain a conversation. Soon, too, they reached the limit of their powers of endurance, for, after being such a long time at sea, they were not very well suited for running up hillsides. It was different with Kotay, however; he ran on when the boys were forced to walk, and when they reached the shoulder of the hill where the ravine split into two, he was just descending from the tree whence they had obtained their first view of the beach that morning.

"Other fellows going out to ship now," he said, hiding a telescope he had appropriated while in the strange depot, somewhere about his person. "I no' know what gully we go down now."

"But I do," said Tom, taking out his pocket compass. "That is our road over there. Go ahead if you can, Kotay, and tell the Captain to get every one on board as soon as possible."

Kotay nodded and at once started off at a rapid rate, and after resting a moment the boys did likewise. They paused at the water-hole to take a drink, but

this time the walking fish and other freaks of nature which surrounded and dwelt in the pool attracted no attention from them, and without delay they continued their journey. About half-way down a smaller water-course joined their gully, and thence their path was alongside a gently trickling stream. Kotay had run through the water, the splashing he made being still visible upon the hard lava sides. As they neared the bottom the ravine seemed to open out into a valley, and suddenly the vegetation over their heads ceased, and they emerged on the beach at the head of a small bay. The *Cinderella* lay moored alongside the banks in front of hem.

There seemed to be no one on board, and the boys ran up the gangway and proceeded to the Captain's room. He was not there; but just then Stansbury came on deck from below, with Kotay at his heels talking volubly, but, judging from the expression on the officer's face, in a manner quite unintelligible.

"Where is Captain Inglis?" cried Tom, as they went up to him. "We must prepare for departure at once."

"Captain Inglis has not returned yet," answered Stansbury. "He and Mr. Preston went away early this morning. We thought you were all together. Has anything happened?"

"Yes; this is not our island. It is the headquarters of a gang of adventurers, and they are on it now. It was their ship we passed the other night, and they are now here and looking for us."

"Oh, then I suppose we'll make for the open sea? I'll gather in these Manillamen and get steam up directly." He rushed into the forecastle, and Powell and

Davis emerged from the engine-room covered with dirt and grease.

"Hullo, boys! you've got back," cried the former. "We've been packing glands and overhauling the engines generally all day. You two will have to stay at home and let us get out to-morrow—that is, of course, if we don't start to load up with pearl shell."

"I am afraid we'll all have to be at home to-morrow," said Tom, and then he made his two comrades acquainted with what they had experienced that day. Thomson meanwhile had rushed to the engine-room, and seeing that everything was right there, he then visited the stokehole and assisted the firemen, who had just been aroused from sleep, to get things in order in their domain so as to have steam at the earliest moment. When he had seen to all matters pertaining to the engineering department, he next went to look for Ah Sing the cook, and at the pantry met Tom bent on a similar mission.

But the genial cook was not there, and the boys made havoc of some edible compound he had prepared for the evening meal. When they regained the deck Stansbury and the Kanaka crew had cast off the moorings and raised the gangway, and all was ready for departure the moment the Captain and Richard returned. It was now about four o'clock, and the afternoon sun was already casting long shadows across the waters of the inlet.

"I suppose we cannot risk firing our signal gun?" said Stansbury. "It would bring the Captain along sooner than anything else."

"But it would be heard all over the island," responded Tom; "and it would bring a pirate craft along, too, with modern quick-firers and a cut-throat crew."

"Wha' fo' some you hungly fellow no come helpy

me bling pigs along o' me?" cried a voice from the shore, and Ah Sing appeared with a struggling and grunting piggery in his train.

"I thought you were on board, Ah Sing," said Stansbury. "What have you got there?"

"Wild pigs. Hims good eat. Catchy allee lot. Wha' fo' some lazy fellow no come help me?"

He was now in full view, and when those on deck saw his method of keeping his unruly captives near him they could not help laughing, although they all scrambled down the rope ladder to his assistance. He had over a dozen wild pigs in tow, but in a manner certainly original, for he was hauling them along tails first, having tied each pig's appendage to one end of a rope, the other end of which he was pulling over his shoulder. The pigs had evidently been struck with the novelty of their situation at first, and had come so far in a fairly tractable mood; but how Ah Sing had manipulated them through the scrub was more than the boys could understand. Now, however, frightened by the sight of the boat, or perhaps thinking they had gone far enough in such unpiglike fashion, they were objecting forcibly and noisily, and trying to run in all directions at once. Hence the Celestial's predicament.

The merriment of his would-be assistants did not appeal to Ah Sing. He did not see why he and his pigs should be subject for laughter.

"Wha' you laf fo'? All vely good laf' now. No laf' long no gettee flesh tuckel soon," he cried indignantly, but his childlike face was entirely unmoved. "Come 'long," he shouted to the pigs, turning and administering a cut with his end of the rope over the back of one of the most refractory quadrupeds. "You

think you get 'way, you big fool. Wha' fo' a fat pig like you hav' so much talkee. You squealee vely soon."

"How did you manage to catch them?" cried Tom, seizing the rope and helping Ah Sing in the tug of war. "Some of us could have shot them if we had only thought of our need for fresh meat."

"Allee same no good shoot," replied the Chinamen. "Shoot, no keep long, catch him alive, he keep allee time. Ah Sing climb out on blanch of tlee and drop a lope down with catch-him-tight loop on him, and rub lope with smell from Manillamen in stokehole. By an' by along come pig; he smell lope, smell again, then put him head in loop. Ah Sing pull him tight; pig squeal. No mattel, him make good tuckel, an' him come along o' me."

"I don't understand all you are saying," observed Tom when Ah Sing had apparently reached the end of his recital. "But I appreciate your foresight in providing us with something to eat, for we are tired of tinned stuff."

Stansbury and Thomson thought the same, and threw their weight on the side of Ah Sing, and thus brought the pigs to the ship's side. Slings were then hastily arranged, and the surprised and vociferous animals were hauled on deck by the Kanakas, and placed in large crates that had previously contained poultry. When this was accomplished, Stansbury suggested moving the *Cinderella* to midstream, as some precaution against a night attack; and, as there was already sufficient steam up to take a few turns out of the engines, this was done. It was now dark, for the sun sets at six in equatorial latitudes, and the boys were much concerned for the safety of the Captain and Richard; but just as they had

almost concluded that something had happened, and that they had fallen into the hands of their enemies, a crackling of the undergrowths heralded the approach of some one, and the Captain's voice hailed the ship.

"Hullo! What's the matter?" he cried. "Why is the ship in midstream?"

"Because there is danger near, Captain," Tom cried back. "We'll come for you in the dinghy."

"What has happened, Tom?" asked Richard anxiously, as he and the Captain were being pulled out to the ship. "We've had a remarkable experience ourselves, or we would have got back earlier."

"The people who attempted to rob us in England, those who sank the *Cinderella,* and those who were watching for us down among the Solomons, are all members of the same gang. They are a syndicate of pirates, wreckers, and everything else, and I suspect—in fact, I know—that it was through their agency the *Southern Cross* and our parents were lost."

"Go slow, young man," said the Captain. "You are excited. Pirates don't exist in this century."

"But they do," cried Tom, "and they are on this island now, and David and I and Kotay hid in their meeting-place to-day, and heard them discuss all sorts of things."

"Just wait a minute until we get on board," said the Captain. "I guess we'll have to get the hang of this affair as squarely as we can." He seized the hanging ladder and scrambled on deck, and the others were not long after him. The boat was then swung to its place by the crew, and all waited to hear the engine bell give the order to depart.

"Shall I take her out, sir?" asked Stansbury, stand-

ing on the bridge. "I know the channel fairly well, for I rowed all over it to-day."

"Take her out? Who said that?" demanded the Captain. "Are we surrounded just now? What in the name of the Commonwealth is all the excitement about? You all seem to have lost your nerve. Switch on those lights, some one; we are not pirates."

"But they may see us," said Tom. "Had we not better make for the open sea, where we should at least have a good chance——"

"Of going to the bottom; and you may bet the *Cinderella* won't come up a second time," broke in the Captain. "Our pirate friends don't cruise about these waters on a craft that can't keep out of gun range of German gunboats, and if they really want us they would soon overhaul us, fast and all as the *Cinderella* is for her size. But let us have the whole story now while Ah Sing is getting ready something to eat. You boys that already know everything, divide yourselves round the ship. Take rifles from the armoury and shoot at anything you see or hear that comes down to the shore. Now, go ahead."

The Captain and Richard seated themselves on the rail, and Tom related all their experiences, the others, except Thomson who stood by in the engine-room, keeping strict watch that no one approached from the shore.

The Captain remained silent for a space after Tom had finished his story; then he remarked musingly, "So we are playing a big game after all. Captain Inglis, I can see your mother spending her days in comfort in Manly now, and your name good for a command anywhere. Anyhow, you'll be able to spend a half-crown without worrying much, after this is through. Oh, I

beg your pardon, gentlemen, I was allowing my fancy to carry me away."

"I fear it could only have been fancy, Captain," said Tom sadly, "if you were conjuring up visions of great wealth. We have not yet found our island, and how can we hope to do so now when these other people can't? And even allowing we did get it, how could we defend ourselves? We can't get any protection, for no one would believe our story, as I heard one of the pirates remark to-day, and we should simply go to swell the list of their previous victims."

"Look here, young man," replied the Captain. "You are ill. You are not the person I knew down in Sydney who bossed things as if he cared for neither man nor devil. You came out from England to find an island whose surrounding waters were rich in pearl shell. We are ten days from Sydney now, and have travelled over two thousand miles in that time, and yet you are in the blues."

"I confess I am, Captain. Perhaps my nerves are unstrung, but disappointment has met us to-day for—excepting when we reached the supposed position of the island—the first time, and I don't know how to tell the others."

"Don't worry about that, Tom," said Richard, who had been thinking deeply. "I am of opinion that Fate led us here. Captain Inglis and I made a startling discovery to-day which fills me with hope that I can scarcely yet bring myself to put into words. We found the ruins of a house on the beach at the south end of the island, and near it was a ship's boat bearing the name *Southern Cross*. I thought we had found out too late where my father and sister and your father had been wrecked, and

that they had perished, but Captain Inglis says that probably they still live, and that they have removed to some other part of the island to avoid the frequent outbursts of ashes from the mountain overhead. Certainly everything pointed to a methodical removal."

"Then you really think, Richard, that our people are still alive and on this island?"

"Say, young man, you had better go to bed, and be able to boss things to-morrow afternoon. I know where your island is, and we'll be digging—I mean diving for pearls then, Adventurers' Syndicate agreeable or not. When we get a cargo of shell we'll come back here, and while the crew are opening them we'll hunt all over the island and find your people if they are here, for I am certain they are alive, and, from what you have told us to-night, I reckon things are going to boom in this part of the world directly. Put out the lights, boys. Everything is safe for the night, for no ship can come in that channel while that red glare from the peak above casts those shadows over the water, and I reckon we can account for those who come overland ourselves. I'll bet my dinner, however, and I'm hungry, they don't know anything about us, and if they did they would be a good bit more skeered than we are. Come along, boys, there is Ah Sing waiting; he is afraid to ring his gong; the whole ship has caught the infection! Let her go, Ah Sing."

Ah Sing's gong sounded out in the still night air with startling suddenness.

## CHAPTER VIII

# On the Pearl Beds

Tom was awakened next morning by the clanging of the engine-room bell, and hastily dressing, went out on deck to see what was happening. The first flush of dawn was just appearing in the east, and the glare of the burning mountain was slowly dissolving into daylight. The air was cool and laden with fragrance, and as the shadowy shores flitted past he thought for the moment that he was in some other world. But the churning of propellers and the beat of engines are not usually associated with spirit land, and there was no doubt about these familiar sounds. He turned suddenly and walked forward to the bridge. The Captain was there, and he could make out the form of Stansbury perched in the bows.

"Good morning, Captain," said Tom. "You have decided on taking her out, after all?"

The Captain turned slightly towards him, but kept his eyes fixed ahead on his course nevertheless.

"Good morning, sir," he responded. "We didn't expect you on deck for an hour yet. I trust you are feeling better this morning."

"Very much better, thank you; I feel fit for anything now. Can I do anything?"

"You can go back to bed till breakfast-time and not worry us here until we get through the reef."

"But, Captain, I do not think you have any reason to talk to me like that."

"I don't mean the slightest disrespect; but I undertook to see you through this affair, and as Stansbury and I are the only paid officers on this ship we mean to do as much as we can ourselves. Come on deck at ten o'clock, and if I haven't grown fat-headed I'll show you your pearling grounds. Powell is in the engine-room, and no one else is required to sail this ship at present."

"But you can have no objection to my remaining on deck if I do not trouble you?"

"None, if you do not trouble yourself. Ah, there's the lagoon now." The *Cinderella* swept into the open water and headed for the surf-portalled break in the outer reef, and the sun shot up over the trees behind them. "If you are going to stay on deck, sir," continued the Captain, addressing Tom, "get your glasses, and watch the beach for any sign of habitation. We are going to sail round this island before going out to sea."

"But the other people——?"

"Cleared out westward during the night. I came down here myself in the dinghy and saw them go, and I now want to find out where they got through the outside reef, for our future benefit."

"They didn't come through. They lay off, and came ashore in a small boat, which they must have dragged over the outer reef."

"Oh, in that case I suppose they couldn't come through the way we came, and there will not be another break in the reef. Their craft must draw more water than the *Cinderella,* and I reckon that fact will give them some trouble before long."

"There is the shark Kotay killed," cried Tom, as the

vessel sailed on in the glassy waters inside the outer reef.

"And there is our friends' house," said Captain Inglis. "We'll pay it a visit and borrow one of their big guns some day soon."

"I can't see it yet," said Tom, in surprise. "Can you really make it out, Captain?"

"Not exactly, but I can see the tracks they made last night leading up to a bluff on shore, and I'll bet all I'm worth the house is behind that somewhere." The Captain was right, as was afterwards proved, but no indication of the house itself was visible, and in a day or so the tracks on the beach would also be obliterated. Tom did not know what the Captain's plans were, nor what he hoped to gain by sailing round the island, but knowing there was some idea in course of evolution in the man's mind, and that he wished to be left severely alone—a sure sign, as the boys had already discovered, that he was thinking out some deep problem,—he walked to the stern and swept the mainland and outer reef alternately with his powerful glasses. But he saw nothing to warrant him calling the Captain's attention. The mainland showed nothing to indicate that any human beings dwelt thereon, and the outer reef stretched unbrokenly, enveloped in a cloud of snowy surf, as far as he could see.

An hour passed, and Thomson joined him on deck, and then Jack, and finally Richard. To each Tom explained all that he knew; but Thomson, whose disposition was fiery, did not seem to see matters in the same light as his partners, and would straightway have raised trouble by asking Captain Inglis what he meant by his tactics, had not the others restrained him. Tom and Richard examined the land carefully, with feelings they

could not have well expressed. They did not regard the circumnavigation of the island as a waste of time, for they now believed that their parents, and perhaps others, were hidden in its dense forests somewhere.

Another hour passed, during which the *Cinderella* had rounded the northern end of the island; but everything remained the same: the outer reef seemed to form a complete barrier all round, against which the surf thundered perpetually; the smooth dark-blue waters inside lazily lapped the pink coral beach, and the fringe of white shells inlaying the latter where it merged into the vegetation of the forest completed the colouring of the picture. The peak which formed the culminating point of the island appeared to be the only object on which any change could be observed. Its sides were steeper, and there seemed to be a patch of low-lying forest-land between its base and the beach. They had now almost completed their circle, and were nearing the southern end, when the ruins of the house the Captain and Richard had seen the day before burst into full view, and Tom and Richard knew that they were looking at a spot where their people had been alive, perhaps only recently.

"Why can't we go ashore and hunt round?" said Jack. "If you think your father and Richard's father and sister were cast away on this part of the island, why not let us all go and look for them?"

"We'll do that when the proper times comes," spoke the Captain's voice behind them, "but we cannot risk leaving the *Cinderella* until we have taken precautions against the return of our other friends. In any case, if there are people marooned on this island they will see the signals at our masthead and any sailor will know

what they mean." The Captain had evidently arrived at a solution of the problem which had been occupying his thoughts since daylight, or he would not voluntarily have left Stansbury on the bridge and joined the partners. "These signals which Stansbury ran up at sunrise read, 'We are coming back—Show lights until return—Friends on board,'" continued the Captain, "and if Captain Grenville is there you can bet he sees them, for a sailor is always on the look-out.—I suppose you will be requesting me to give up my ticket, sir?" he said, suddenly turning to Tom; "I wasn't over polite to you this morning."

"I am not a small school-boy, Captain," responded Tom, "that I should take offence at anything you said. You were the only one on board who kept his head last night, and while we were sleeping you risked your life in our interests by going out to watch our enemies No, Captain, my partners and I appreciate you too much for any of us to feel aggrieved at not being addressed as if we were—shall we say—members of your Commonwealth Parliament?"

"Not by many miles," the Captain laughed, "that's not what you meant to say, I'll bet. Members of the Federal House! Why, those poor beggars have to stand cheek from every one in the continent of Australia. Oh no, I wouldn't speak to Ah Sing or the Kanakas as they are spoken to. But do you know why we came round this island, boys?"

"To look for signs of habitation?" said Richard.

"Well, no, I did not think there was much use in doing that until we had got the whip hand of the pirate crowd. By the way, I don't know if I ever told you that Penfold got hold of a yarn about these fellows. He told it to me, thinking you boys were part of the gang,

but I laughed at the story. Anyhow, they're real enough, and it was to find out how we might be able to best them that we came round here, and I reckon we can just about do it too."

"Explain, Captain, please," said Richard.

"Well, you have seen for yourselves that there is no break in that outer reef anywhere except where we came through, and we'll be up there again in less than half an hour. That shows that the other fellows can't bring their craft inshore anywhere without coming through that gap, and as it was all the *Cinderella* could do to make the passage, it can only be by a tight fit that their ship can manage, for she is about three times our size."

"I don't quite see your point, Captain," observed Thomson.

"Why, it's simple enough. Haul some of the guns they've got in that armoury of theirs up the hillside and train them on the gap, and when they try to come through blow them out of the water."

"But that would be murder. We dare not fire upon ships like that," said Tom.

"We don't need. When they come near the gap land a couple of shells right in the middle and they'll sheer off quick enough. Anyhow, we can stick up a notice warning them off, and I don't fancy they'll risk our being afraid to fire on them."

"But they can come ashore in the night in their boats?"

"Which they will be a bit chary of doing, for they'll never dream that we are so weak, and skunks like them don't like taking any chances in cases where they might

get hit back. Besides, we need a depôt ourselves, where we can open our shell."

"Ah, and that reminds me, Captain," interrupted Tom. "What about our island? There is not enough shell in this lagoon to pay our working it, and what, therefore, is the use of our defending this island?"

"Because, as I have said, we need a depôt. There does not happen to be any dry land to spare where your own island is, else our friends the wreckers would have found it long ago, and we can use this place for discharging our cargoes and opening the shell. Our pearling grounds are only a couple of hours' sail away, or I'll admit that I haven't enough savy to be in command of a tram car. There's the gap in the reef now; excuse me, boys, I'll take her through myself—you can get your diving gear ready."

The Captain strode forward, and the partners endeavoured to puzzle out the meaning of what he had said. But now they were off the inlet which had sheltered them since Sunday, and which they had cleared that morning, and all prepared to watch the passage of the *Cinderella* through the outer reef towards which she had headed. "Half speed" rang the engine bell, and instantly the watchful Powell responded. Gallantly the ship glided on with decreased momentum until the deep booming sound of the baffled surf swelled into a thunderous discordant roar. Then "Stop" rang the telegraph, and immediately after, "Full speed astern."

"We are grounded!" cried Thomson. "We are going astern."

"No, we're not," said Richard. "The Captain is experimenting, that's all." But further conversation

was impossible, for they were in the heart of a wall of boiling spray which broke over the deck and drenched every one. The boys heard the sharp tinkle of the engine-room bell again, and then Stansbury ran past them and did something at the stern of the ship. They had stopped in the middle of the passage. Again the bell rang out above the deafening roar, and suddenly the wall of foam was left in the rear, and the sun poured its merciless rays down upon the steaming deck. While yet they stood watching the swiftly receding reef, the Captain came up to them, and Stansbury again took the bridge.

"It is just as I thought, boys," the Captain said. "I risked stopping in the gap to see what water we had underneath. There is barely three fathoms in the centre, so I don't think that any ship bigger than our own will ever come through that channel. My! I'm hungry."

As if waiting for some one to express this sentiment, Ah Sing appeared in the companion-way and summoned them to breakfast. When the meal was over, the crew, acting under orders from the Captain, opened the hatches and brought up all the appliances that had been put on board at Sydney in connection with pearling plant, and the partners found themselves carefully going over the various parts and fittings of their patent diver with an enthusiasm which they had not felt since the raising of the ship they were on from the bottom of the sea. Air-pipes, telephone wires, ropes, and everything necessary were soon attached; and then, although none would have admitted the fact, they began estimating the space the shells would take up, and how many tons the *Cinderella* could carry away. Somehow they felt that Fortune was about to smile on them, and the fact

that their island was not yet visible, although Captain Inglis had said they would arrive an hour after breakfast, did not seem to trouble them.

"It will be low-lying," said Tom; "just a coral reef I suppose, and we'll not see it until we are on it."

"We must be pretty near the spot where we first looked for our island," remarked Richard, as they congregated in the bows to look out for their promised land. "We've been sailing west all the time."

"Stop!" suddenly rang out the engine-room bell, and the thud of the engines ceased and the *Cinderella* cleaved the waters silently. Soon she came to rest, and, before the boys could grasp the meaning of the stopping, the Captain shouted out a command to the crew, and with a whirr the anchor was dropped overboard.

"Well, boys, are you ready?" asked the Captain. "We're there!"

"What!" cried Tom. "I thought you knew where the island was?"

"Well, I've brought you to it. Are you going to haul it up, or do you intend to take the shell up only?"

"I don't understand you, Captain," said Tom. "Surely you are not jesting."

"Certainly not. This spot is exactly where you first meant to come, and Captain Grenville made no mistake when he said there was an island here. There was; but it has gone down since he saw it, as I ought to have thought at first. Your oysters are on its ledges just the same, however, and as it has not yet sunk very far you will still be able to work them, and we can take the shell back to our depot for sorting and cleaning.—Well, Kotay, what is it?" Captain Inglis turned to the Japanese, who had been trying to attract the attention of the boys for

some time. He seemed very much afraid of the Captain, however, and dodged back into the companion-way when the latter addressed him.

"I think he wants to tell us something," said Tom; "I'll go and hear what he has to say."

"If he hasn't something worth telling," growled the Captain, "I'll set him to wash up for Ah Sing. He has no right to come on this deck; his place is forward."

"What a martinet you are, Captain," laughed Richard, dropping a sounding-line over the side. "He is not a bad little fellow at all."

"There is not going to be any socialistic business on this ship," answered the Captain; "he is only the steward and must be kept in his place. A fine thing it would be if the Kanaka crew and the Manilla firemen were to walk on the same deck as the Captain and owners. They would want to sit at the same table next."

"Kotay says there is a very rich oyster bed on our starboard quarter," said Tom, rejoining the party.

"Indeed," said the Captain. "How does he know?"

"Plenty shark there—see fins now. He live where plenty sea-snake, 'cos he feed on them," put in Kotay, coming forward hesitatingly at Tom's request. "Look, lot of sea-snake over there."

"But what in thunder have sea-snakes to do with oysters?" asked the Captain.

"He live near oyster bed, 'cos he like make good feed on oyster," answered the little man simply. "I know, and would like to help bosses. I blamed good diver."

"The water on this side is only six fathoms deep," cried Richard; "but it is getting deeper."

"It is only three fathoms here," said Jack excitedly from the starboard side.

"By the Commonwealth! but the Jap knows what he is talking about," said the Captain. "Where are the most oysters, Kotay?"

"Down a long way over near that big fellow shark," answered the Jap. "But it too deep there for diver. You put me into dress, I will go down over bows and get plenty shell. Think there is a good patch there not too deep."

"Six fathoms here," Stansbury called out from the bows.

"All right, boys," said Tom. "We have arrived at our destination at last, and before we are many minutes older we'll know whether or not its pearl oyster deposits are what we expected or not."

"It is a pity that we can't step on to our island without getting wet," observed Powell, coming from the engine-room. "Who is going down first?"

"Let Kotay go first," advised the Captain; "it doesn't matter so much for him if anything happens."

"Nothing will happen we have not already made all preparations for," said Tom, at once becoming the man of action, and assuming his old manner of preciseness. "Thomson, I think you had better go first."

"All right," responded the engineer with alacrity. But suddenly his face fell; Jack was already inside the diving dress.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, old man," Jack cried, "but I have been almost useless during the trip and——"

"Come out," ordered Thomson. "What do you know of pearl shell?"

"Nothing—and you?"

"Everything."

"Let him go, David," said Tom. "Perhaps, after all,

we need the engineers more on top, and you can go next."

"It is a mean trick to play on a fellow," muttered Thomson. "He'll never cease letting us know he was the first to set foot on our island."

"I'll never mention the fact, David," said his comrade, and with that Thomson had to be content. The partners adjusted all the fittings finally, saw that the mercury was in its proper place, tried the air-pump, and spoke to Jack through the telephone. "Are you all right?" Tom asked, and receiving an answer in the affirmative the patent diver was hoisted on a crane and dropped overboard, the vessel meanwhile having been swung round to bring the part whence it was easiest to work the dress near where Kotay had indicated.

The diver went down with a rush. Thomson and Richard manned the air-pumps, and a stream of escaping air-bubbles rose to the surface of the water.

"Are you all right?" Tom asked through the telephone.

"I will be in a minute," came the answer feebly; "I am very sick."

"By Jupiter! I had forgotten that," said Thomson. "Poor Jack!"

But Jack soon recovered himself, and his first words were of wonderment and surprise. "I am in a forest," he spoke; "trees are all around me, and hundreds of funny fish are swimming under and over me—Oh, I see oyster shells, lots of them. I've got one over a foot in diameter. Lower a net so that I can send some up."

Tom repeated what he said to the others, and the Captain sent a weighted net down.

"You fellows have got the best of me now," he

remarked; "running along the bottom of the Pacific is a thing I never learned to do."

Meanwhile, to the diver below new scenes and flitting panorama were unfolding themselves. He stood on a coral floor, and all around him grew submarine plants of a symmetry and beauty he had never seen equalled on land. Great sprays of coral swayed in a gentle current, much the same as shrubbery would do in a garden when under the influence of a slight breeze. High above him rose a stately coral-tree with waving branches and delicate leaf-like tendrils, and beside him a large star-shaped mass of coral shot its points into the upper currents. At the base of this magnificent growth a cluster of enormous pearl oyster shells reposed, and remembering his business instinctively, he lifted them with his patent-lever grip from the bed whereon they had probably lain since the last typhoon stirred the depths in these latitudes. Some rainbow-hued sponge formations of gigantic size next met his view, and he raked them in with one of his forked arms. Instantly a swarm of beautifully-striped eel-like creatures swam forth and surrounded him. Their sinuous bodies were only about the thickness of a pencil, and from eighteen inches to two feet in length; but Jack knew that these so called sea-snakes, however unpleasant they could make themselves to unprotected divers, were powerless to inconvenience him, and so ignored them. He found another bunch of shells underneath where they had been lying, however, and as his net was now full he telephoned to those above to haul it up and lower it again. Thus the first-fruits of the long and carefully-planned expedition were laid before the partners. The shells were all large, and Kotay, forgetting his fear of the Captain, bounded forward when he

saw them, exclaiming, "Very good shell. My word! best shell I ever know. Bet a dollar good pearl in that fellow; he is older than my father."

But already Jack was sending another net-load aloft, and as its contents were emptied on the deck the Captain's enthusiasm mastered his dignity, and he jumped down on the well-deck and began classing the shells himself. In this he was joined by Kotay, who seemed to possess a wonderful amount of knowledge on the matter, and, as net-load after net-load came up, the well-deck soon began to assume the appearance of a pearling lugger.

"You had better come up now, Jack," spoke Tom. "There may be bad consequences attending a prolonged stay below."

"No fear," responded Jack. "I feel first-class. Move me a little bit so that I can reach fresh ground."

Powell and Stansbury at once pulled the swinging arm of the crane farther over, and Jack found himself in an entirely different world in the space of a few feet. He was in a dense forest of sea-wood now, and even the floor was carpeted by an exquisite green moss, inlaid with myriads of tiny shells. Round him the long, trailing tendrils wound themselves; the water was much darker here because of their shadows, and he could only barely distinguish the forms of the various fish that sallied from the eternal quiet of their mossy beds to inspect him. But Jack was now a pearler before every thing else, and he raked the oozy bottom carefully with his hanging attachments, and gave his attention only to the pearl shell he saw.

Then another change came: the *Cinderella* had swung round on her anchor, and Jack had been carried with it. He was now suspended in mid-water among the tops of

the branches of the submarine forest. The water was much clearer owing to the sunlight filtering through, which the *Cinderella* herself had previously prevented. For a moment Jack forgot he was under the sea. He thought he was hanging in mid-air, although he was not conscious of any effort or strain of suspension. Birds flew from branch to branch, and beautiful buds unfolded before his eyes. All round him was a waving mass of delicate, gorgeously-coloured foliage, but somehow it was exquisitely outlined red and white feathers that took the place of leaves. Far below him, in the semi-darkness, he could see the outline of many strange plants and flowers, and around them flitted shapes and forms he had never seen before.

Then a shadow came between him and the light, and he was brought back to a knowledge of his actual surroundings with an abruptness not good for ordinary nerves. A large shark was descending on him in hesitating circling sweeps, as if half afraid to attack the new usurper of his submarine domain, and instantly Jack saw that the waving branches were coral and seaweed growths, that his birds were fish, and that his feathery leaves were the result of the coral polyp's life's sacrifice. But the shark had now come to rest before him, and was critically examining his possible weak points. Jack looked through the glasses straight into the creature's eyes, and wondered if he really were the first human being to hold an interview with a live shark at such close quarters. He was certainly not afraid, but his old spirit of reckless, overmastering curiosity came over him, and he smiled to himself. "I think I can invent something that will cause your kind to keep away from us while at work, Mr. Shark," he remarked; "but, in the mean-

time, how do you like that?" He caused one of the diver's steel arms to rise suddenly and with all the force at his disposal, and the barbed points with which the ends were adorned, to assist in retaining a hold on any object seized, struck deep into the ugly monster's side. The look of bewilderment that came into the shark's eyes convinced Jack that even these ferocious prowlers of the deep have some dim sort of reasoning instinct. But he had little time to make a study of sharkly expression, for the water became a confused, whirling blur, in which seemed to be mixed coral branches, seaweed, shell-fish, and shark. At almost the same moment the monster's tail came in violent contact with the diver's exterior, and Jack felt himself swinging like a pendulum through the disturbed waters. A streak of silver grey was visible for a fraction of a second as it flashed away into the gloom of deeper water, and when the diver came to rest all was calm again, and Tom was speaking through the telephone asking if anything had gone wrong.

"No," answered Jack. "A shark dropped down to see me, but I was not at home to him, and I don't think he'll stop going until he hits an iceberg or South America. Lower me a bit, I'm hanging among the tree-tops just now."

Next moment the bottom of the sea rushed up to him, and he dug out some very large shells half embedded in a sandy patch. Then he felt his head become giddy, and tried to speak, but found he could not utter a sound, and dimly realised he was falling, falling into bottomless space. A deep sleep came over him, in which he dreamt a hideous dream that seemed to run on for centuries, and then he suddenly discovered that he was

lying on the *Cinderella's* deck, with his comrades, the Captain, and Kotay bending over him.

"What has happened, boys?" he cried. "It feels as if I had not seen you for ages."

"You were dropped to the sixteen fathom level too suddenly for the air-pumps to keep pace with you," said Tom. "When Kotay saw the sixteen line go over, he shrieked something in his native tongue and rushed up to Powell, who was at the winch. We didn't know what he meant, but Powell guessed Kotay was saying something was wrong and hauled you up. I spoke to you while we were raising you, but you did not answer, and you opened your eyes the minute the fresh air blew across your face on deck. What happened?"

"I don't know; I got awfully sick all at once, and then I dreamt for a hundred years, and awoke to find myself here."

"No diver not used to deep sea live down sixteen," put in Kotay. "Divers up at Thursday Island and round at Broome only live two years if keep on diving that deep, and they are all Manillamen or Japanese too. Why not let me go down? Can't kill me; I no' care for sharks or devil-fish or nothing; I bully good diver."

"Why did you stop diving, then?" queried the Captain. "It is a better-paying profession than that of steward."

"Oh, I found out how to make oyster spit out pearl, an' the boss sack me."

"I see. You made them spit out the pearls when no one was looking," laughed the Captain, assisting Jack to his feet, now completely recovered.

"That's what the Chinkie cleaners said, an' the silly old fool of a boss believed them, an' no listen to me

when I tell him Kotay would no' steal. He tell other pearlers no' give me a job too, an' I came away. He very very sorry now, I'll bet, for Chinkies are the biggest stealers of pearls in the world."

"Wha' fo no one come fo' dinnel?" interrupted Ah Sing, coming along the deck. "Wha' fo' I make good tuckel an' no one come fo' it?"

"Jove, I forgot I was hungry," muttered Richard and the Captain simultaneously, and the same remark might well have been ascribed to every one, including the greatly-interested crew and firemen, who had been watching all the proceedings intently.

"I think we can well afford a rest now," said Tom. "At the present rate of progress we shall make a fortune very soon. Mother-of-pearl shell was worth one hundred and eighty pounds per ton when we left Sydney; so, without counting on any pearls we may have, we are amassing wealth at the rate of over two hundred pounds a day, for we can easily have over a ton of shell on board before night."

After an excellent lunch of roast wild pig, pearling operations were resumed, and this time Thomson went down. Greater care was taken now to keep the diver at a medium depth, and net-load after net-load of particularly fine pearl shell came up periodically.

Thomson was not of a poetical temperament, and did not pay much attention to the marvellous sights around him; and perhaps it was just as well that it was he who had relieved Jack, for the scenes of the morning, although just as surprising, had changed considerably. The diver was working on a ledge fourteen fathoms deep, about twelve feet deeper than the region of Jack's enchanted garden. The submarine forest was still there,

and also the upshooting seaweed, but, instead of the brilliant colours and graceful shapes which Jack had seen, a dismal sombre hue overspread everything, and the only forms discernible in the gloom were those of repulsive overgrown crabs, huge octopoda, and enormous creatures of the eel family. Among the spreading roots of the great sea plants reposed many clusters of pearl oysters, and to these the practical Thomson confined his attention, and the pile of bivalvular casings on deck increased rapidly. After half-an-hour's work he was hauled up for a rest, much against his will; but Tom was obdurate, for Kotay had told him that fifteen minutes was the longest time any pearl diver should be down, and, although their invention perhaps rendered a longer period quite harmless, there was nothing to be gained by taking unnecessary risks. The Captain wanted to relieve Thomson, but the latter would not hear of it. "I am not a nigger," he said, "and if a black man can stay down a quarter of an hour in an ordinary dress, surely I can stand half a day?"

"That's all right," returned the Captain. "But I can see with my eyes shut that it will pay me better in future to go as much in for cruising about at the bottom of the sea as on top, and I want to see what it's like before you fellows ruin that patent diving machine you've got."

"You can go down any time you like, Captain, when once we are sure that the pirates may not suddenly bear down upon us. What would we do if you were below at such a time?"

"I had forgotten all about those low-down beggars," muttered the Captain; "and, by Queensland! we haven't been keeping any watch."

"I have, sir," said Stansbury; "but we'll not be able to do so at night if they come along without lights."

"By Jupiter! Tom," said Richard, "it is a good thing after all that our island is under water. Those friends of ours would have found it long ago if it had been otherwise."

"Well, lower me again," interrupted Thomson; "I want to explore a dense part of a forest down there before it gets dark."

A minute later he was dropped overboard, and all on top took up their respective duties, and soon after more shell began to come up. The *Cinderella* was continually shifting her position as she swung at her anchor, and thus Thomson during his second period below was suddenly confronted by an inky black abyss which yawned at his feet. "I would like to go down there and see if the shells are bigger," he muttered as he propelled himself across the gulf, "but I don't suppose I could induce Tom to allow me to go." Nor had he any desire to explore the depths himself next minute. As he paddled towards the middle, a long, shiny, twisting object reached out of the gloom and encircled the diver in its folds. Then another tentacle shot up, and another, and another, until the casement wherein Thomson lived was bound round and round several times. Then the large pulpy, almost translucent creature, whose arms it was had encircled the diver, raised itself from its darksome den and a great flaring eye gleamed in front of the glasses.

"What a nuisance," said Thomson to himself; "I suppose this must be an exceptionally large devil-fish. It seems a good bit more formidable, too, than that one I once read of in Victor Hugo's book."

"Anything wrong?" spoke Tom through the telephone, which was always fixed to the ear of the man inside the diver.

"Nothing special," replied Thomson; "a fair-sized devil-fish or cat-fish, or something of that nature, is having an argument with me, and he doesn't seem to mind my prodding him, where his ribs should be, with my sharpest-pointed arm. Swing me over a bit, I am in a hole just now."

"We are going to haul you up," said Tom. "Powell says that something is pulling at the winch so much that he has had to apply his band brakes."

"By Jove! Haul away, then. This fellow looks as if he could squash our diver into nothing and digest him if he tried hard." Before Thomson had finished speaking, Tom signed to Powell, and he started his engines. They seemed to hesitate for a moment, and the steam blew through the open ports; but then they went away with a rush, the drums revolved, and the diver came up.

"Great centipedes!" ejaculated the Captain, "look what is sticking around your machine."

"It is the devil-fish," said Tom coolly; "we must get rid of it. Does anybody know how to kill that thing?"

"We'll have to chop it to pieces," said the Captain; "these creatures won't let go. But I never heard of one that size before. Why, it almost justifies the old yarn about them hauling ships down."

"But how are we to get Thomson out?" cried Richard. "We must still keep pumping air to him, and can't stop to lend a hand to destroy the—the thing."

"Haul him on board," said the Captain. "I'll get all the crew along with their knives."

"No good," cried Kotay, overhearing the Captain's

words; "give him steam, he no like that, he let go then. I see him often in Torres Strait. Steam chase him away."

"But we can't turn a steam-pipe on it," said Tom as the diver and its encumbrance reached the deck; "we'd heat up the metal and burn Thomson too."

The Captain lopped one of the creature's tentacles from the machine with an axe, and it turned its basilisk eye upon him and flung another limb in a long sweeping curve towards him. But here the Kanakas joined in the attack, and the diver was knocked over on its side in the *mêlée*. Doubtless the battle would have been ended eventually in favour of the crew, but Powell forestalled them by running to the engine-room and starting the dynamo. Then armed with two cables he approached the creature, and from a safe distance inserted them in its loathsome body. There was an indescribable smell for a moment, and some sparks danced along the metallic coating of the diver, but the effect was quick. The creature flung out all its limbs, lashed the deck convulsively for a short time, and then stiffened out. Powell raised the diver in mid-air when he saw it was free, and, as the crew rushed in and despatched the hideous, helpless creature of the deep, Thomson was liberated from his aluminium bronze casement. Shortly afterwards the Kanakas had washed away all signs of the fray, and highly satisfied with their day's work the partners prepared for dinner.

The sun went down and darkness fell over the waters, and when all work was over for the night Powell and Davis brought out their banjos.

## CHAPTER IX

# The Spoils of the Sea

THE night passed without incident, much to every one's satisfaction, and in the morning pearling work was resumed. Tom now insisted on going down into the depths himself, and, although the others protested that only he could superintend on top, he laughed and said he had full confidence in the abilities of any of his comrades to stand by with a telephone receiver at his ear, which was all he had done. As Tom's word was regarded as final on board the *Cinderella,* nothing remained but to allow him to go down, and soon after daylight he stood—inside the diver, of course—on what looked like a wind-swept beach, but which really was a ledge ten fathoms deep, exposed to the influence of some submarine current. He had the usual period of intense sickness before he became accustomed to the high-pressed air in which he lived, but when that was over he instantly set about his duties.

Where he was the luxuriant vegetation which Jack and Thomson had described was absent, but he could see a dim waving mass a few yards to his right, and knew that if he paddled himself down the sloping bottom to a greater depth he would be amid surroundings of a similar nature. But as there was plenty of shell on the ledge on which he rested, he resolved to stay where he was, and began digging out the bivalves near him

with his cleverly designed and constructed appendages. Here the shells were half buried in the clean-washed bottom, and it required some effort to dislodge them. For a time Tom wondered why they had so fastened themselves; but it soon dawned upon him that they, like all things on earth, were merely obeying nature's great law of self-preservation, for assuredly they would have been swept away into what perhaps they knew was a less congenial environment if they had not so secured themselves.

Tom remained below for about half-an-hour, and then was hauled up on deck for a breath of fresh air, and just as he was about to go down again Thomson came out of the engine-room with two long weighted rubber-covered copper wires. "I got the idea from Powell last night," he remarked, dropping the end of one over the side, "but I have improved on it a bit." He fastened one end of the other wire to the outside casing of the diver and added, "I've rigged up a pretty big electric transformer beside the dynamos, and these are the secondary wires from it. When any of those people who stay down there come too close to you, just tell us through the telephone, and prod him somewhere with that free wire that is down already."

"But won't I receive a shock myself?" asked Tom.

"No, the diver by reason of its build is a perfect insulator inside. There can be no electricity inside a hollow conductor, you know, and anyhow you can't possibly come into contact with the other wire."

"But the current, if it is at the tension you say, will always be sparking across from that wire to complete its circuit with the other wire through the diver. That

will electrolyse the water and generate a cloud of bubbling gas which will interfere with the sight."

"No it won't, at least not while you're working. The current will only be switched on up here when you telephone that you require it; then I have no doubt hydrogen and other gases will be liberated, but they will fairly stream from the body of the fellow who tackles you. The water, being salt, will act as a conductor between him and the diver, and the Pacific Ocean around where you are will be turned into a huge electroplating vat. By Jupiter! there will be fun. Imagine yourself and a shark as the positive and negative electrodes."

"When you scientists come back to language that an average man can understand, let me know," said the Captain. "I like to listen to you playing with the old Pacific, but I don't think it very fair to hurl such scientific terms at it."

"Thomson has no respect for anything but engines and dynamos," laughed Tom. "But, as he always continues to be right in what he thinks, I believe you may safely drop me into deeper water this time, and I'll keep his live wire within reach."

The diver was closed and lowered into the water once more, and this time the cables paid out until sixteen fathoms was registered. The Captain and Jack manned the pumps, Powell worked the winch, and Richard kept the telephone to his ear. Tom was certainly surprised when he reached bottom. Instead of a clean hard floor, bare of vegetation like the scene of his last exploit, he was now in a veritable forest with overhead branches and twining undergrowths, a black shell-encrusted wall rising behind him to the shallower levels.

Light seemed to be penetrating the waters farther away from the wall, and he moved over and gazed around. Sponges of all shades and shapes, seaweed, and graceful Neptune's cups, beautiful, strange shell-like blossoms, and star-shaped objects—white, yellow, and pink in colour—blazed everywhere. Fish, large and small, swam in and out among the lace-like branches, as lazily as if the entire submarine world had been made for their enjoyment; and large exquisitely-formed shell-fish lay peacefully among the undergrowths. Tom thought he had never seen anything to match the splendour of the garden spread before him, and idly watched the antics of the inhabitants for some time. Near him were several mounds on the coralline bottom, and round them great numbers of the smaller fish seemed to be amusing themselves; but Tom could not make out the substance of which the mounds were composed, nor why the fish kept so close to them.

Then his eyes rested on some exceptionally large pearl oysters, and he set to work, and for the next quarter of an hour his net went up and down regularly. The fish at first had been startled by his approach; but now growing bolder as they saw their strange visitor did not make war on them, they surrounded him and examined the diver critically, and who knows, perhaps intelligently.

Then suddenly the scene was changed, and the quiet, peaceful spot became one of headlong haste and confusion. Tom looked up; a dark shadow had descended into the garden, and everything else alive had disappeared. The place was now like a city of the dead, and over it brooded a large evil-eyed shark. Tom stopped

to watch the new visitor, and wondered where all the fish had gone. Incidentally he also telephoned aloft for the transformed current to be turned on, then he laughed in surprise and amusement. He saw where the fish had gone; they had retreated inside the mounds, evidently having been warned by an outpost that probably gave his life for the others, of the approach of their rapacious foe. They were peering out at him through hundreds of apertures resembling nothing so much as miniature doors and windows, and doubtless enjoying the shark's discomfiture.

"I never knew that fish built houses," Tom said to himself; "but I suppose there are many things in this water world which we don't know. I wonder what that fellow is thinking? He can't feel too well pleased at losing his breakfast."

But whatever the shark thought, it did not convey its impressions to Tom; it came up to him instead, in a manner which plainly meant fight, and Tom promptly pushed the needle-ended wire which hung beside him into its side. The shark spun around like a lightning-flash and brushed the diver with its tail. That was quite enough, Thomson's patent did the rest. In that great land of silence a sound was probably heard for the first time. It was a hissing, crackling sound, and it accompanied the generation of a dense turbid cloud of hydrogen gas. Perhaps, too, a smell of burning shark was perceptible to the fish world; but if so, it did not last long, for, as if by magic, the waters cleared and the diver was alone in the desolate waste. The shark had left for other parts, and Tom requested those above to switch off the current, adding that the patent had worked

well. He sent up several net-loads of shell afterwards, and was then hoisted to the surface without being asked how he felt, and Captain Inglis took his place.

Thus the day passed, and the pearl shell accumulated until it began to assume the importance of a cargo, and the hatches had to be opened to accommodate the fast-increasing store. After the Captain had spent an hour below, Powell took a turn at diving, and before the day was done all the partners had made themselves familiar with the sea-bed and its wonders. Then, when all were tired out, Kotay was permitted to descend, and for the next hour the shell came up as fast as those on top could raise and lower the net.

When darkness fell, a watch was again set, and they amused themselves with music and story-telling. In the morning work went on again. By night the forward hatch was filled with shell, and again the ship was given over to merriment and rest. Next day the submarine reef was explored, and proved to be a narrow ring of coral which approached to within fifteen feet of the surface, sloping gradually down therefrom to depths which they could not determine. The reef was approximately three miles in circumference, and from the state of its highest point Captain Inglis concluded it had been above the surface only four years previously.

"Islands are always going up or down about here," he explained. "You may call them earthquakes or what you like, but I saw Krakatoa blow itself to blazes, and I was sailing round when Tahiti was drowned out. I also know a good few islands between here and the equator that are not on any chart I have ever seen, and there are a fair amount on the Admiralty chart that would need a fellow with a divining rod to find. Anyhow, there

are more disturbances and alteration in the earth's surface throughout the Pacific than most people dream. I wonder if, when the pink terraces of New Zealand were destroyed and——"

"Smoke down on the west!" sang out Stansbury from the look-out on the mast.

"Howling hurricanes!" cried the Captain. "It must be the pirate crowd, for there is nothing else ever comes here, unless a German cruiser looking for poachers. Get steam up at once and we'll clear. They can't see us for some time yet, unless they are on the mast look-out."

Instantly all was bustle, but there was no confusion, and in a very short space of time Thomson announced that there was steam enough to get under way. The smoke of the oncoming ship was not yet visible from the *Cinderella's* deck, but it was becoming more plain to Stansbury every minute.

"Then let her go," cried the Captain. "Full speed ahead! and we'll get out of the way before they can see us, for we have no smoke column to betray us."

In less than a minute the *Cinderella* had picked up her anchor, and before it was on board she was headed eastward and moving through the water at an eight-knot speed. It was close on sundown when Stansbury had sighted the smoke cloud, and therefore those on board the *Cinderella* knew that soon darkness would favour them. And while the sea became enshrouded in the blackness of night the little vessel raced on with ever-increasing speed as the pressure of steam on her boilers mounted towards the maximum.

"Where are we going, Captain?" asked Richard, as the phosphorescent waves flew from the bows with the gathering momentum.

"To our depot," answered the Captain. "Allowing these people are those whom we have reason to expect, they can't follow us there unless in small boats, and I reckon we can meet them on that level. Besides, we have a fair cargo of shell on board that we must land soon or it will become smelliferous, and we are badly wanting some more fresh meat."

Two hours later the *Cinderella* passed through the gap in the reef round the island they had first seen the Sunday before, and with course illuminated by the burning hill-top steamed slowly across the lagoon and up the inlet, finally coming to rest in mid-stream near where they had first landed.

"You may ring up dinner, Ah Sing," the Captain remarked to the cook when the anchor was down. "I don't think we shall be troubled to-night, for the other fellow must be as tired as we are."

"But what about to-morrow?" asked Richard. "They will find us then if they come here."

"When you are as old as I am you will learn that to-morrow always takes care of itself," answered the Captain,—"at least so far as worry is concerned, for I've never known a day yet that didn't bring along its own share of that."

"Let us go about our business as if those other people didn't exist," said Tom. "We must sort out our shells and get them cleaned, and we may as well start erecting the tables Kotay talks of for that purpose to-morrow. If our friends visit us, well, we are not entirely defenceless, and it is more than probable they will not know of our existence. Anyhow, they can't sail up here and——"

"If they come in a small boat we will reduce them

to their elements with our transformer," added Thomson. "I don't think pirates know anything about that method of fighting."

"We'll give them a surprise some day soon, I reckon," the Captain murmured as they went down to dinner, and the boys wondered how long the time could be postponed when they and the wreckers must come to a direct trial of strength.

A double watch was kept all night, the entire ship's company being pressed into service; but morning at length broke over the mountain top, and nothing had happened. As soon as it was clear enough to see, Tom and Stansbury ran up the covered rock cleft to the look-out tree at the junction of the two gullies whence the boys had previously looked down on the beach. Nothing could be seen; as far as the eye could reach, the sparkling waters danced in the rays of the morning sun, bearing upon its surface only a few wing-weary birds.

"They have gone," observed Stansbury. "I wonder what they mean by sailing aimlessly over the face of the water."

"Oh, I know now," said Tom; "they are sailing in parallel courses east and west looking for the island. We heard them arrange that." Returning down to the ship again, the news was given that the island was their own once more, and, free from a great weight of worry, all started to cut down trees and build long tables, upon which to arrange their treasure. Neither the boys nor the officers knew anything about the proper treatment of the shell; but Kotay seemed to know everything, and at once took command of operations. "We make long table," he said, "slopey up and down, and make big pocket along bottom end for hold water. Then we put

oyster on top end an' lay him all along. Soon he gets tired keeping his mouth shut, an' when he opens it to see where he is, pearl comes out and rolls down into water in pocket at bottom."

"You talkee talkee too muchee," observed Ah Sing, who had been taking great interest in the work. "Dig big hole in glound an' put all him oysta inside, then covel him up, an' oysta open him shell to see whe' hims get to. Hims no able shut again, an' when shell dug upee him all clean."

"That is another Chinkie trick," sneered Kotay, "How you save pearl that way?"

"Put him box in hole befo' oysta', an' when oysta' all deaded put box in wata' an' him he wash way alee samee vely quick. Shell and pelil stay along a box allee time."

The partners were puzzled, and even the Captain seemed at a loss what to do, for it was quite evident that both Kotay and Ah Sing were experts in pearling, but each belonged to a different school.

Here one of the firemen came forward, his not unhandsome black face beaming all over, and his remarkably fine teeth showing through his parted lips.

"Well, Aquinili, what is it?" asked the Captain.

"I no' like speak not spoken be," said the Manillaman; "but I work along Malay pearl diving boys up in Ceylon and then at Broome. I hear what Kotay say; it good, but heap quicker to open shell with knife, that best way."

"Ya, ya!" screamed Ah Sing excitedly. "Allee samee dodgee ovel again. You open shell knife an' who gets pelil? Me cheatee too muchee that way too; know

too muchee let any fello' go fool about shell with knife. No get any pelil that way."

"You dirty yellow chow chow," quietly spoke the Manilla man. "You big thief yourself, think other people steal too. I like take knife to you, you no' good, look two way eyes, tucker stealing cook."

The fireman might have said more, but Ah Sing had hurriedly departed to attend to his dinner preparations, and thus rendered any further remarks very much out of place. Richard at once proceeded to engage the angry one in conversation, and by the exercise of great tact soon had him working with redoubled energy at sawing wood for the tables.

"It seems to me that pearling entails many vexed questions," said the Captain. "I wonder why that is the case?"

"It's easily explained," answered Tom "Pearls of great value are frequently found, and it appears that those engaged in opening and cleaning the shell consider that they have more right to them than those who raised the shell."

"That is so," remarked Kotay, who was erecting standards for his table. "Master pearlers never get much pearls. Chinkie swindle them by making oyster spit before him ready, an' when open him with knife, Malays, Chinese, Kanakas, and Australian aborigines, and other cheat people who do that work, hide all pearls in mouth. No pearls lost or stolen this time, though. Kotay see to that all right."

Without further delay the work of building the tables was pushed ahead, and soon a space was cleared on the beach of the hidden haven, and a long standard of partly-

dressed wood erected thereon. The partners and the two officers worked industriously with saw and plane, and the Kanakas and Manillamen felled great trees and ripped them into rough planks. In the afternoon the sloping tables were completed, and then the cargo of shell was discharged from the *Cinderella* and laid in position along the higher side.

About this time the Captain seemed to remember something, and calling Tom to his side he said, "Are you any good at painting?"

"Not much," responded Tom; "but surely you are not thinking of painting the tables?"

"No, I said painting! I didn't mean slinging paint from a pot. I want to put up a notice something like this, and I don't know if my own lettering could be read at a distance." He produced a sheet of paper, and on it was inscribed: "Notice:—this island is private property. Poaching prohibited. Filibusters will be sunk."

"That is a bit drastic, is it not?" said Tom. "Supposing a German cruiser came along?"

"We should have to sink our notice-board before she saw it, that's all. Can you print it?"

"Well, yes, I think I could letter that easily enough. It is one of the shortest yet most complete notices I have ever seen; but it does seem a bit ridiculous sticking it up in the Pacific Ocean."

"Then get it done as soon as you can," said the Captain. "Make it big. Print it on a sail sheet or something, and I will go and rig up a mast in a barrel to carry it."

Tom and the Captain went on deck to set about their work, and just as the sun went down they finished.

When dinner was over, and all the others were enjoying themselves, the Captain got the crew to lower the dinghy quietly, and towing the barrel astern, Tom and he rowed out to the lagoon. The half moon was now high in the heavens, and its light, mingling with that from the volcano, cast an indescribable, weird effect over the waters, and the boom of the surf seemed an unearthly musical accompaniment to a passing scene from another world. Right through the centre of the gap in the outer reef they rowed, and there the Captain stuck the mast bearing the sail and inscription in the barrel, and attaching an anchor and chain, dropped the whole into the sea. The barrel floated perfectly, and bore its banner aloft as if proud of the message it carried, and after inspecting it from all points the two sailed back to the *Cinderella.*

Then a council of war was held, at which the Captain recommended measures which after some debate were carried, and soon after the prospective pearler kings retired to rest, for a day on shore after a period at sea is very exhausting. Next day was Sunday, and the entire ship's company rested, for neither the Captain nor the partners would allow any work to be done on that day.

On Monday morning after breakfast, Stansbury was left in charge of the ship with Ah Sing, Aquinili, and two Kanakas, all the rest forming into two parties, under the leadership of the Captain and Tom, to pay a visit to the Adventurers' depot. The Captain's party, which included Thomson, Jack, and Richard, and one Kanaka, went round by boat, and Tom's division, consisting of Powell, Kotay, and a couple of Manillamen, proceeded along the course of the subterranean passage. Tom's

party arrived first, and excepting that all the cases had been rearranged, probably while the Adventurers had been engaged in their search for the wild cats, they found the place much as it was before. Kotay grinned when he saw the new position of the boxes, and walked up closer to inspect them.

"Here is one corked up smell pretty good on the fight," he remarked. "It is same box of tinned cabbage I stuck knife into one. I show you again. Just have to pull out plug of paper——"

"No, no, Kotay," cried Tom. "Don't remove your plug just now. We have work to do here."

Powell meanwhile had been attracted by the assortment of scientific instruments and weapons of war that were stored in one end of the house, and already he had singled out some appliances which he thought would be of service on the *Cinderella.* The Manillamen likewise had made an inventory of what the place contained, and it required all Tom's tact to prevent them from appropriating at once everything they could see in the way of personal adornment. Kotay, however, seemed entirely indifferent to the possible spoil around. He had climbed over some cases of tinned food-stuffs, and his active mind had found occupation in the contemplation of a very fine diver's outfit which lay in a corner. Coils of rope and tackle, pulleys, jacks, and other useful engineering devices were also scattered about the place in careless fashion, and behind a portable forge, that rested upside down, the Jap's quick eye detected a strange square ornamental box with a large trumpet-like affair lying beside it. He instantly leaped over the forge and examined his latest find, and was thus engaged when Tom and the others went out to walk along the

beach to meet the Captain's party, who evidently had to come a much longer route than the overland one.

The two parties met near where the shark had been killed, and after hauling it out to the middle of the lagoon, where it would soon be eaten by other sharks, they went on to the depot, one party walking along the beach and the other rowing beside them. As they neared the hidden house after beaching the boat at the most convenient point, the loud strains of a brass band burst upon them, and they stopped in sheer amazement.

"What in creation is that?" cried the Captain. "Have I gone mad? Or is this one of the enchanted islands?"

"But that is a brass band. It must be the band of a German cruiser," spoke Jack. "We had better make for cover until we see what it means."

"Where's Kotay?" asked Richard, and every one missed the little Japanese for the first time.

Then Richard laughed. "He is in your mysterious house," he said, "and is playing a very fine gramophone. This is indeed the most modern and complete depot I have ever known. Just imagine a gramophone with a good selection of the latest records to while away the time on an island like this."

"All islands are not like this," said the Captain, as the party moved on again, amused at the manner in which they had been cheated. "Many are really desert islands, patches of bare rock, in which nothing can find root. It is only the islands of story-books, and a few of the Friendlies, Fijis, and some up here, that are not fever swamps or worse."

The gramophone now began a weird bagpipe selection, which made them hasten to put an end to what they

termed the infliction. Thomson, however, was of opinion that his comrades really appreciated the wild Caledonian music as much as he did himself, and certainly the Manillamen and Kanakas enjoyed the peculiar sounds thoroughly. At all events, the record was finished before any one reached the house, and as Tom went through the window Kotay started something of the nature of a song in which one person asks another, "What are the wild waves saying?"

"Saying?" ejaculated the Captain, suddenly pausing half through the window. "By smoke! I know what the wild waves are saying. They are calling me the biggest duffer that ever came along this way."

"What's the matter?" asked Tom.

"Matter? I've just remembered that we forgot to sign our notice of trespass out there."

"Dear me, Captain, why should we sign it? It will serve to make our special enemies hesitate, and we surely don't dream of stopping gunboats."

"Ah, well, we'll see about it later," said the Captain, landing inside. "But shade of the great G. R., what have we here! That is a 4.7 gun and there are ammunition cases. Why, the people who come here must have a regular fleet! Look round for ropes, boys; we'll mount that gun somewhere up the mountain, and that quick-firer over there will just do nicely for the *Cinderella.*"

"But isn't this something like stealing?" suggested Tom. "Have we any right to take other people's property?"

"Whose property do you think you are taking?" asked the Captain. "Everything you see here has been taken off ships the pirates have sunk or stolen. We

are merely using their own weapons to fight them, and if we ever run across the original owners I am sure we shall have much pleasure in restoring anything we have taken."

None of the partners offered any further objection; they all knew that sooner or later they would have to deal with the Adventurers, and if they intended to defend their property they could not afford to neglect any chances of strengthening themselves at the expense of the enemy. Kotay meanwhile was providing music which certainly was of a varied nature, but suddenly he put his head over the pile of cases and announced, "Plenty rope and tackle here."

"Throw it out, then," ordered the Captain; and starting another record, Kotay obeyed, adding, as if he knew exactly what was required, some wheels and axles.

At once Thomson and Powell improvised a carriage, and the gun was levered and wedged in position thereon and hauled down to the boat. Tom then searched for the best shore entrance to the rock cleft, and in a short time the gun was taken round to that point, and by means of block and tackle, which the two engineers ingeniously fixed to trees overhead, hauled in successive stages up the mountain. It was slow work and hard, but as each difficulty presented itself Thomson and Powell met it and devised means to overcome it. Thus early in the afternoon they had reached a point in the main cleft far above the fork, and as the vegetation had now ceased to flourish with the luxuriance of lower altitudes, and they were no longer in a covered way, they could look down over the tops of the trees on the lower slopes upon the gap in the outer reef. Here the gun

was carefully mounted and trained upon the gap, the position and range having been taken very accurately by the Captain and Richard with instruments borrowed from the Adventurers' depot.

"By the great Australian Bight!" exclaimed the Captain, when all was completed, "we could hold this island against a fleet now. Even allowing a war-boat could reach us at this range, she would need to drop her shells straight down on us to hurt us, and I doubt if there are any guns in the Pacific, away from Sydney Harbour defences, that could tackle that range."

"It is remarkable," agreed Tom, "how this gully serves our purpose. Any ship before she could fire at us must come in line with us down at the gap, otherwise she will merely be wasting shot, for the rocky sides protect us."

"And anything that comes in line can be sent to the bottom—a pity it is not deeper—quicker than those on board will find good for their health," murmured the Captain enthusiastically. "Now I wonder if we could hit that notice-board?"

"I think so," said Richard; "she is trained on the barrel now."

"Then let her go. We'll have to put up a new notice, anyhow. Oh, I forgot we didn't bring any ammunition."

"There is a case of ammunition on the carriage," observed Thomson, "we used it as a saddle for the gun coming up."

"By Jupiter! did we?" exclaimed the Captain. "Young man, it was no doubt a good saddle, but we ought to be somewhere up in space just now. How that case of ammunition stood all the bumping and jolt-

ing the gun got coming up here, and how near we were to leaving this island to the other fellows, are two points I feel a bit anxious about, but——" The Captain smiled reflectively, and his eyes wandered down over the waters. "However, seeing we have ammunition, suppose we load her?"

"She is loaded," said Richard, "we hauled her up loaded."

"What!" cried the amazed officer. Then seeing the boys looking surprised at his excitement, he said almost apologetically, "Well, you fellows are the coolest I've ever struck. Do you mean to say you knew what you were doing?"

"Dear me, Captain," said Tom, "I confess I am somewhat surprised at you. What was the use of a gun up here without anything with which to charge her. The amount of force necessary to fire gelignite, dynamite, gunpowder, and all explosives is well known, and didn't you see Thomson and Powell taking all care to minimise jerks? Besides, even had the ammunition gone off, little harm would have been done, as the resistance is small, and the powder most probably would only burn. As for the gun being loaded, that was quite safe, for it couldn't possibly go off without being fired, and——"

"That will do," cried the Captain; "after this I will express no surprise at whatever you people do. Only, if you tell me in advance that you are going to put a foot-rule or a spring balance on the explosive power of dynamite, I'll—well—I'll—Blow it! but I'll help you. You can't make a mistake. You'll be hauling down the sun some day."

"Do you see your notice-board, Captain?" inter-

rupted Richard, standing by the gun and working with its mechanism.

"Yes; I can't read it, though."

"Then watch it." Richard pulled the firing cord, a flash of flame flew from the muzzle, the earth shook with a deafening report, and with a hissing sound like that of escaping steam the shell tore through the air.

Instantly a column of water shot up around the floating barrel, and when it subsided the notice-board was not there. Then the mountain clefts caught up the echo of the discharge, and the hillsides boomed for the next minute as if a battery of artillery was in action.

"I reckon that is good enough for anything," remarked the Captain, removing his binoculars from his eyes and smiling all round. "If any fool of a pirate tries to come through that channel after seeing a shot like that, he deserves what he'll get. I'll go down and get a new notice-board ready."

Feeling that they were now in a measure secure from a sea attack, the party returned to the depot and transferred a quick-firing Colt to their boat. They also took away some rifles and ammunition and rearranged the remaining pieces of artillery, so that at first sight nothing would be missed should the Adventurers return suddenly and land in a small boat. Kotay was engaged trying to pack the gramophone into an empty jam tin case, but he looked up when he saw preparations being made for final departure. "Why you no' take diver dress too?" he said. "Get pearl shell much faster if two divers down at same time."

"We wouldn't care to risk ourselves in the ordinary

dress," answered Tom; but the Captain seemed struck with an idea.

"I believe it would be a good plan," he said. "Kotay could work the shallower levels in the orthodox dress, while the patent diver could stick to the deep water among the big shell."

"Yes, my word, you bet!" cried Kotay. "You bring diver dress along. I'll work him. No get as much shell as other fellow, but get good lot. Kanakas can work air-pump and——"

"I'll fix up a telephone in connection with that dress in no time," said Thomson. "But, by Jupiter! you will have to keep in the shallow water, Kotay, for we can't protect you from big devil-fish in that antiquated garb."

But Kotay did not seem to worry much over the dangers of the deep. "I have killed cat-fish big enough to be grandfather of fellow we kill," he said, "and every shark in the sea know better than to come near me. I have killed lots of him, and he know it."

It was therefore decided to take the dress too, so they lumbered it down to the beach with their other spoils. Thomson and Jack with the two firemen then departed with as much of their newly-acquired property as their little craft could carry, and the others went round by their friendly passage. The overlanders reached the *Cinderella* first, and found Stansbury greatly alarmed. He had heard the shot fired up the mountain, and even heard the hiss of the shell as it curved through the air over his head, but of course was in ignorance of what it had meant and who had fired it; hence his fears. Matters were soon explained to him; and then taking the *Cinderella's* other boat, the Captain, Richard,

and two Kanakas went round for the rest of their goods.

At daylight next morning the *Cinderella* sailed back to the pearl beds, and this time the boys kept their eyes fixed on their island to see how it was that they could not observe it from their field of operations. Gradually its outline grew indistinct, then the mountain became shrouded in a blue haze, and long before they should have been out of sight its presence was only marked by a darker blue than the surrounding atmosphere. While looking at it the vessel stopped and the anchor went overboard. They had arrived at their own special property once more; and they realized how easy it was to miss an island in those quarters, for they were still gazing at the dark cloud which they knew was the mountain peak, and yet would not have known the fact had they not watched it gradually merge into the haze.

All day the divers worked, Kotay and Aquinili relieving each other in the ordinary dress, and the boys in the other, Stansbury also going down that day to experience what deep-sea diving was like. At night they returned to the island and spread out their shell, and next morning went out again, anchoring a new notice in the spot where the former one had been shot away, and bearing the same inscription. Again success crowned their efforts, and at night they returned with another fair cargo.

On Thursday, Thomson was left behind at his own request. He had constructed an ingeniously-contrived piece of apparatus by which he calculated their gun could be fired with electricity like modern naval guns; but not satisfied with that, he desired to connect it so

that it could be fired from the *Cinderella's* deck if need be, and therefore wished to lay the necessary wires.

The *Cinderella* returned early that day, for a cloud of smoke had been sighted away to the north, and neither the Captain nor the partners wished to run any risks, for it was not at all likely that any vessel would be cruising in that quarter unless a German gunboat or those they had even more reason to fear. Thomson had not returned, but they could see his connections ready for attaching to the ship's switchboard while she was alongside, and tracing them Powell soon saw that they led up the mountain.

"He'll be trying to finish laying the wires to-day," he remarked to Tom, who was inspecting the opening tables before the sun went down.

Jack was also having a look around at the lower end, and suddenly his comrades were startled by a cry from him. "Here are half-a-dozen pearls," he cried, "and they are beauties." He put his hand into the water-filled pocket which ran round the lower part of the tables, and held up one or two tiny shimmering spheroids the size of small peas.

"Our fortunes are made, boys," said Tom with restrained excitement. "These have been ejected by those shells that opened this morning. Perhaps there will be more. Call the Captain and the others."

At that moment Thomson burst out from the undergrowths shaking and perspiring. "There are people on the island," he cried; "I saw one, a white person too; I chased him, or maybe her, for miles, but I got lost."

## CHAPTER X

# A German Cruiser Puts in an Appearance

THE three boys gazed at their comrade in perplexed silence. They had certainly thought there might be some traces of marooned mariners somewhere on the island, but they did not dream of mysterious people who fled at sight being so near them as Thomson's words implied.

"Are you quite sure, David?" asked Tom quietly.

"As sure as I am that I see you. I am not troubled with an imaginative fancy, as you know. The person evidently had been watching me working at the gun, and went off like a deer when I suddenly saw him."

"Then let us go on deck and think the matter over," said Tom. "It may have been some one belonging to the *Southern Cross.*"

The boys walked up the gangway, and the light from the mountain took the place of daylight. The Captain, Richard, and Stansbury were called and shown the pearls. Then at Tom's request Thomson told his story over again.

"You are certain it was a white person and not a native?" queried the Captain when he had finished.

"Quite. I saw his face for a moment; it was very boyish, but his dress was somewhat peculiar."

"Do you think, Captain," said Richard, "that it could possibly have been any one wrecked here?"

"It seems possible. But, dear me, we've made plenty of noise; why didn't they visit us before?"

"And why was he skulking along behind me?" put in Thomson. "And if he were honest, why did he run whenever I sighted him? I almost felt inclined to try a shot at him from my revolver, but I couldn't bring myself to do it, and before I had gained more than half the separating distance on him I found myself in a hopeless forest entanglement, from which I only emerged when you saw me."

"Then you were actually gaining upon the person?" said the Captain, puzzled. "That proves it was no native, for they are as fleet as a locomotive."

"I was running twice as fast as he was," said Thomson, "and would have caught him in another hundred yards if he hadn't gone off into the forest."

"Well, my boy, in my opinion the matter requires investigation," said the Captain. "We can't very well leave a cargo of pearl shell, and probably a fortune in pearls, lying open to people who evidently know of our presence here and won't come forward."

"But they may be shipwrecked or victims of the pirates," suggested Jack. "We should make friends with them and thus strengthen our own position."

"They might even be the remnant of the crew of the *Southern Cross,*" said Tom. "Some of them stuck to my father and Mr. Preston, and we know they were on this island."

"Suppose we sail right round the island to-night?" suggested Stansbury. "We asked them to show lights

if there was any one to see us, and it strikes me that it is about time we went round for a reply."

"We can't risk it, Stansbury," returned the Captain. "The craft that produced the smoke we saw would be bound to see our lights, and we don't know what would follow on our being discovered."

"But we don't require lights, sir," persisted the junior officer. "We shall be inside the lagoon all the time, and the volcano gives sufficient light for navigation. We know that no other craft can be inside, and a vessel outside could not distinguish our form against the background of forest and mountain."

"Boy, there is something in what you say," mused the Captain. "What is your opinion?" He turned to the partners.

"I should be inclined to risk it," said Tom. "We know that no ship could negotiate the gap during the night, and if there are any people on the island it is time we should know them."

"I agree with you, Tom," added Richard. "If any of our people are here, they will have lights burning in answer to our signals of last week; and if there is another detachment of our pirate friends on this island, the sooner we know all about them the better for ourselves."

The others were of a similar opinion; but Thomson proposed that an exploring party be also formed to search the island with one of the Kanakas or Kotay as a guide. It was resolved, however, to make the tour round the island first, as that could be done at night even more satisfactorily than by day, and if nothing rewarded their cruise, to organise an expedition in the morning.

When this was settled the two engineers went below

and saw about raising the steam to its maximum working pressure. The fires had not been fully extinguished, and, with oil jets that could be brought up to their fullest efficiency in twenty minutes, the steam was blowing off at the safety valve before dinner was over. The crew wondered what all the excitement meant, but they knew by this time that their masters were not like ordinary people, and, as Tom had told them they would be well paid for doing their best at all times, they did not question anything, but went about their respective duties as if night cruises round volcanoes, without any lights, and possibly a gunboat in the distance, were what they had been accustomed to all their lives.

It was a beautiful night, and the glorious constellations of the south shone out brilliantly as the *Cinderella* glided almost noiselessly into the lagoon and swung round in a circling northward course. The moonlight and the glare from the top of the mountain lit up the placid phosphorescent waters as clearly almost as day, and the Captain headed the *Cinderella* close inshore, so as to be in the shadows of the mountain as much as possible. The precaution proved to be a wise one before they had gone far, for as they rounded a bluff half-way towards the northern end of the island the lights of a very large vessel burst suddenly upon them, and instantly the *Cinderella* was stopped and a council was held.

"That is a cruiser," said the Captain. "She is looking for something too. Look at her searchlight lighting up the nor'-west. She's on the track of something, I'll go nap."

"She must be a magnificent ship," commented Tom. "It can't be us she is after?"

"No, I don't think so. We've done nothing that

they can know of to be honoured with an A 1 cruiser like that on our heels. By the great Pacific! she's sweeping the ocean with that light of hers. Tell Thomson to open her out, we'll race back for that bluff, and if we don't get there before they turn their lantern on the island, we're done."

Before he had finished speaking the *Cinderella* was under way, and swinging her round in a short curve that threatened to break the vessel in two, the Captain headed her for the shelter of the bluff they had just rounded. They were none too soon. Just as they darted behind the projecting arm the war-boat's searchlight began to play on the island. Swiftly the beams travelled along the slopes, lighting up the entire lagoon in its passage with startling vividness. The rays reached the bluff, passed overhead, and then receded away to the north.

"It's a good thing a searchlight has not the properties of the X ray," commented Jack, watching the trail of light speeding over the waters, "or we should be hauled out to answer for our sins."

"We stand a fair chance of being used for target practice yet," observed the Captain. "I wish you boys would make some calculations and tell us how deep we should be sunk if a shot from a ten-inch gun struck us."

"Deeper than our diver could work safely, at any rate," laughed Tom. "I wonder if we are to be stuck here all night?"

"They are going away," cried Jack from the masthead; "I can just see her top lights from here, and they are moving swiftly to the west."

"What is that you say?" cried the Captain. "Go-

ing away, are they? Then they have got on the track of their friends. Howling hurricanes! I believe it must be the pirates they're after. It must have been *their* dirty smoke we saw this afternoon, and Mr. German was waiting for them, and they've sheered off. Let her go, boys. We'll continue our cruise, and good luck to Germany."

The *Cinderella* cautiously moved out from her hiding-place, and it then became clear to all that something had just occurred which necessitated the cruiser's immediate departure. She was travelling westwards through the water at full speed, dense clouds of smoke belching from her three funnels, and her searchlight sweeping the ocean far ahead at intervals.

"I suppose she has just caught sight of something suspicious," remarked Powell, who had just been relieved by Thomson in the engine-room.

"Either that or the Commander has just remembered an appointment he had with some one over New Guinea way," replied the Captain. "Anyhow, I reckon she'll give the fellows who are after us all the excitement they want for some time."

With increased speed the *Cinderella* now held on her course, and soon rounded the northern end of the island; then swinging round the other side she was headed in a southerly direction, and in time reached a point opposite to that whence they had started. Suddenly Jack uttered an exclamation and pointed up the hillside. "Look there!" he cried. "I see signals of some kind."

Instantly every night glass was levelled at the spot indicated, and a row of smouldering fires was made out.

"That might only be patches of timber set on fire by a lava stream," said the Captain, "so don't build your hopes too high. They are not burning brightly as signals should."

"No, but there is a design in the way the fires are placed," cried Richard, greatly excited. "Oh! it may be my father and sister and Captain Grenville who lit them. See! they form a triangle. Why, that is a regular signal."

"They've gone out," called Jack. "I can't see them now."

"That settles it, then, boys," said the Captain. "I didn't lay much stress on the fires, for they are easily enough caused on the slopes of a volcano, but they couldn't go out themselves all at once. There are people there. Your orders, sir?" He turned to Tom, ringing down "stop" at the same time.

"I think we should land and investigate," said Tom. "We can anchor here until daylight, and start out then. Those lights must be a good few miles inland."

"About five. But we can never cut a path back through that scrub to the base of the mountain."

"But if there are people there they must have found a track of some kind."

"I think we should land near the house," said Richard. "Perhaps some of the Kanakas could pick up a track leading from there inland. It seems likely that whoever are living back in the mountain, first had their camp where we found the ruins."

"That is if they are the same people," put in the Captain. "And if so, we may reasonably conclude that your father is there too."

"Then let us land now," said Jack eagerly. "We

can go through the jungle, or whatever you like to call it, just as easily by night as by day."

Tom did not speak. The thought had just struck him that his father might be among the people on the mountain slope, but a prisoner; otherwise why had the fires been extinguished? He expressed his feelings to Richard, who was also thinking something of a similar nature.

"But," asked the latter, "why were the fires lit at all if they did not wish to draw attention? They could see us quite plainly in the brilliant moonlight."

"That is just the point," answered Tom. "Either the signal was not meant for us, or else it was the work of some of the people without the knowledge of the others, and we have just witnessed the result."

"Gentlemen, we can land now, if you wish," interrupted the Captain. "The old house is just over there. I don't know that a night expedition is wise, all the same. We may be going into a trap, and there will likely be some very nasty animals and reptiles about at this time, which will make things a bit unpleasant."

"You are right, Captain," said Tom. "We must move cautiously, although I feel myself that I would like to rush up there at once."

But the wisdom of waiting till morning was evident to all, although their boyish enthusiasm and love of adventure would have caused them to disregard all precaution, had not Tom sided with the Captain.

At daylight, therefore, after some heated discussion as to who was to be left to take care of the ship, a party, consisting of Tom, Richard, Powell, Stansbury, two firemen, and two Kanakas, went ashore, and almost immediately one of the keen-eyed South Sea Islanders

picked up a track grown over with creeping plants. Shouting to the others, he then ran along the little pad, breaking the resisting cobweb of vegetation by his momentum. The rest followed as closely as they could, but they could not keep pace with the fleet-footed Kanakas and Manillamen, and floundered on until their path suddenly broke into one of the strange covered lava ways, and there they found their guides awaiting them.

Progress was now much easier, the air being cool and pleasant in the darkened passage, and, travelling as swiftly as possible, they eventually reached the base of the mountain proper. For the next hour they toiled up the bed of their gully, and then the vegetation overhead ceased abruptly, and climbing out of the cleft they saw the *Cinderella* floating at anchor far away down over the tree-tops.

"We are very near the spot where the fires were," said Stansbury, taking a rough bearing with his compass. He felt of great importance at that moment, for he was the senior of Richard by a year and a half, and therefore the leader of the expedition.

"I wish we had brought Kotay," said Tom. "He would have been sure to find something or other at the proper moment to guide us on."

"I reckon I can do all that is needed in that line," said Stansbury, a trifle hurt. "There are tracks here as if a considerable number of people had passed, but I see no signs of any habitation. Ah! there are the marks of the fires. But there is no one here. What does it mean?"

"People not long away," said one of the Kanakas. "White fellow, one, two of him here this morning."

He pointed to some marks in the ashes, but the boys saw no significance in them.

"How do you know?" Tom asked. "Tell us all you can about them."

"One fellow big, heavy, slow. Other fellow no' big, no' heavy, no' slow. This them feetmarks when him kick away fire this morning."

Sure enough there were two different sizes of footprints on the white-ash-strewn ground; but that they were human footmarks was certainly not clear to the boys, for they were merely oblong depressions in the ash and might have been caused by anything, at least so the comrades thought.

"But how do you know they were here this morning?" asked Powell, and no sooner had he spoken than he would have given anything to recall his words. The answer to his question was obvious.

But no one seemed to notice his error of perception, and all seemed to take it as information when the Kanaka answered: "Fire here last night. No ash till fire burn away. White fellows no' walk on hot ash. Ash here white fellows walk on it, or how see their footmarks? White fellow walk on ash this morning."

"Of course," cried Richard; "we must be dense not to have grasped that much. Apparently, too, they have been scattering the remnant of the fires as much as possible so as to hide their sites from any one who did not actually stumble across them."

The Kanaka grinned. Probably he did not understand what Richard said, but his grin signified that Richard had, in his opinion, spoken truly.

"From which I gather they are hiding from us," hazarded Stansbury.

"My word, you bet your life. Hims white fellow up here no' want see you here," spoke the language-gifted Islander. "Hims hide somewhere now."

The boys looked around. They were standing in a clearing which bore signs that part of it at least had been the work of man. A little way off a piece of ground was under cultivation, and closer inspection showed that the garden grew onions, cabbages, and potatoes. But where were the owners? No sign of them excepting the impressions in the scattered ash beds could be seen. Far beneath, the *Cinderella* was plainly visible, and the boys knew that their every movement was watched through powerful telescopes. To their right and left the bare hillside extended, broken only by the large fissures that led from the top of the mountain to the sea beach. Behind them a rocky bluff rose, sheer for a hundred feet and then tapered towards the peak, over which a slight cloud hung. Where, then, were the people who had set the fires alight and then were so eager to destroy them? No one could answer that question.

Vainly the Kanakas and Manillamen tried to earn the praise of their masters by discovering some clue to their whereabouts. All traces stopped at the ashes of the fires. For two hours the party roamed about the hillside looking for some sign that might lead them to where the people were, and then both Tom and Richard were forced to the conclusion that their parents could not be the authors of the fires, for assuredly they would not have hidden from any one. Another hour was passed in further search, and then Stansbury, looking through his glasses, announced that the *Cinderella* was signalling "Return at once."

Reluctantly, yet admitting that they could do nothing by remaining, unless perhaps run into some trap, for it seemed now that whoever lived on the island were not disposed to be friendly, a start upon the return journey was made, and just at sundown, hungry, tired, and disappointed, they reached the shore. Soon afterwards the ship was under way again, and Ah Sing ministered to their comforts, and an hour later the *Cinderella* was alongside her mooring place beside the opening tables.

"Never mind, boys," said the Captain, by way of encouragement when he heard their story; "we'll stick to our pearling business, and when we sell our first cargo of shell we can go and hunt all over the Pacific for your people."

"I am sure that this island has something to do with their fate," said Richard; "I seem to hear my father and sister calling on me in my dreams even."

"We'll find them, Richard," said Tom. "We'll reverse matters and chase the Adventurers, as they call themselves, and force them to tell us where our people are. We know they are alive somewhere."

But nothing more could be done that night, and soon only the night watches, which consisted of Thomson, Kotay, and a Kanaka, remained on deck; the rest were sleeping.

In the morning Tom and Richard went round the tables and found fourteen splendid pearls in the ledge along the lower side. One or two of them were larger than any they had ever seen, and Kotay expressed the opinion that one was the largest and finest in the world.

"How can we leave this place now?" asked Rich-

ard; "those people may come down and rob us at any moment!"

"I don't think they will trouble to carry away much shell," said the Captain; "and you will have to go round the tables every morning before we sail and take all the pearls cast out during the night."

"An' before Ah Sing gets up," added Kotay, who chanced to overhear. "Him yellow chow, can't help stealin' pearl if he gets chance."

"There is something in that too," the Captain laughed; "stealing is an instinct with some people, especially Orientals. Some of them would steal the bristles from your tooth-brush; but I don't think there is much chance of any one stealing here."

"Oh, all chows an' Malays take pearl. They no' call it steal. They no' take anything else; but devil must be in pearl, for yellow fellows can't help steal him."

"Yah! Getee outee, you allee samee yellow fellow you'sel'. Wha' fo' you tellee bosses Chinaman no' help steal? You big fool. Get kickee outee some day."

Ah Sing stood at the far end of the tables, the picture of innocent, childlike indignation.

"What are you doing here, Ah Sing?" asked Tom.

"Me come asho' to catch bleakfast. You likee wilee duck? Wilee duck vely good when Ah Sing cook him. Catchee two." He held up two ducks.

"Never mind the wild ducks just now," said the Captain sternly; "how many pearls have you taken?"

"Me no steal any pelil. My eye dlop on wile duck flyin' ovel tables, an' me come asho' to catch him. Him fly down an' steal something flom table an' I knockee him down. Think him got pelils in mouf."

Ah Sing was right. Each of the duck's bills when opened showed several pearls.

"This is worse than ever. Some one will always have to stay here to frighten the birds now," said Richard; and all, excepting Ah Sing, laughed.

"If you shoot the bird that steals pearls we shall have to do without a cook," the Captain said. Then addressing Ah Sing: "You tell the wild ducks that our engineers are fitting up lightning along the tables, and if they touch any more pearls they will die the same way as the devil-fish did last week, and have their pig-tails cut too."

"Me tellee them, Captain. Me in big hully just now, get bleakfast leady."

"All right, clear out."

The Celestial ran up the gangway and disappeared in the region of the cooking galley.

"It seems Kotay was correct in his estimation of Chinamen after all," said Tom, examining the additional pearls they had now received. The Japanese had gone on deck to assist the cook, and incidentally to have a pleasant little discussion with him anent various things.

"Yes," Richard agreed, "we'll have to watch our own men now as well as outsiders."

"I don't think so," the Captain remarked. "Even Ah Sing did not steal the pearls with any intention of robbing you; he simply could not resist the temptation of lifting them when he saw them in the pocket, and probably would have given them back before long. The rest of the crew are too much afraid of Thomson's lightning to touch anything he has had a hand in making, and I don't believe that Ah Sing will put a hand on the tables again."

"The oysters are beginning to smell badly now," observed Tom; "I suppose we ought to burn or bury those already opened."

"We'll turn the crew on to that directly," said the Captain, "and then we'll cross this little inlet and build a kind of wharf lower down, so as to be away from the odours which always must attend pearling work."

After breakfast, the Kanakas, who did not appear to be in the least fastidious, gathered all the open shell and washed them. They then cleaned the long table, making it ready for the next cargo, and buried all the putrefying carcases. Meanwhile, the others had cut away overhanging branches and part of the undergrowths on the opposite side of the stream until the *Cinderella* could be safely berthed alongside. Afterwards the cleansed shell were stacked near, and then Kotay brought out his purloined gramophone and inflicted "Home, Sweet Home" upon his enforced listeners.

As it was Saturday afternoon, and the party were already in possession of considerable pearl wealth, as well as a fair quantity of shell, it was decided to spend the rest of the day in a shooting and trapping excursion for the benefit of their larder. This was attended with great success, and a stock of ducks, pigs, turkeys, and various kinds of other game was placed in crates on the forward deck for future use. A supply of fresh water was also taken on board, and some general repairs made throughout the ship. Thus when the sun went down that night the *Cinderella* was well equipped and prepared for almost any contingency.

On Sunday, as was usual with them, all rested from their labours, and on Monday morning at daylight the

*Cinderella* cleared the gap, bound once more for the pearling grounds.

Once more the partners took turn about among the huge submarine fern-like formations, while Kotay conducted operations on the shallower levels. By noon a large quantity of shell had been brought on deck, and Powell was just manœuvring below to obtain a couple of very large oysters he saw under a coral moss-covered rock, when Tom called through the telephone, "We're hauling you up, there is a steamer in sight." At the same minute the diver was swiftly raised, and in another moment was standing on deck looking at a great smoke-cloud bearing down upon them.

"Get into the engine-room and help Thomson," the Captain cried; "shake up the firemen, and get steam up at once. Here, all you others, throw that shell overboard, and lower that patent diving gear down the hatchway. Pitch the ordinary dress over too. Stansbury, get into your uniform and take the bridge, and, as soon as there is enough steam to move, head her southwest. You boys, as soon as the decks are clear of everything in connection with pearling, get to your cabins and dress, and report to me for further orders."

The Captain was instantly obeyed in all he said. The firemen had rushed below; Thomson was already in the engine-room, and Stansbury had disappeared as soon as the Captain had finished speaking to him. Tom and Jack without hesitation sprang at once to assist the Kanakas in throwing the result of their morning's work back into the ocean, and Richard, Kotay, and Ah Sing turned their attention to the diving apparatus without a word. Powell at the first order had gone below to the stokehole, and almost immediately the boilers began to blow

off steam. Then Stansbury reappeared dressed smartly as an officer in tropical attire, and took his place on the bridge.

"Now, lads, no excitement," cried the Captain. "That is the German cruiser coming down on us, and we must keep our nerves. I am going to dress now, and you, Richard, put on your uniform also, and be ready to act as chief officer." The Captain went into his cabin and Stansbury took command.

"Up anchor," he ordered, and in response the winch at the forecastle head began to creak and the anchor came up swiftly. "Make it fast on board," he next cried, and the crew, assisted by the boys, obeyed. "Full speed ahead!" he rang down to the engine-room, and as the engines began to throb and the propeller to churn the water he swung the *Cinderella* round to the south-west. Then he seemed to hesitate, and threw an appealing glance at Richard who was still engaged with the disposal of the diving gear. "We are south-west now," he cried.

"That is correct, then," answered Richard without looking up. "That is what the Captain ordered."

"But that course will take us right across the German's bows. We are running to meet her. We'll be alongside in half an hour."

"Never mind, the Captain makes no mistakes; he knows his business," replied Richard, finishing his work and running below.

Stansbury took his bearings carefully, and headed the ship towards the rapidly-nearing war-boat. He also caused the Commonwealth flag to be run up to the mast-head. Ten minutes later the Captain, resplendent in a

white dress with gold bands on his sleeves and cap, and bars across his shoulders, was lolling in a deck-chair with a cigar in his mouth he had cut in two before lighting. Tom and Jack dressed in flannels leaned carelessly against the rail and scrutinised the big cruiser through their glasses, and Kotay, dressed very neatly as steward, flitted about the deck.

"No, boys, there are hardly enough of us. Get Thomson and Powell up too," the Captain remarked. "We have ten minutes yet, and there must be nothing suspicious about us. The engines will run themselves for the next five minutes, and we'll be stopped by that time. Instruct the firemen to be in evidence also when we stop. We daren't appear to be under-manned. Ah, there goes her signal!"

"She is flying 'Heave to,'" cried Stansbury from the bridge.

"Then do so," the Captain answered. "We can't very well refuse to do what a war-boat demands."

The *Cinderella* stopped; the cruiser did likewise, and a smoking steam pinnace on her deck was lowered and manned by a crew of smart-looking sailors, headed by a gorgeously-dressed officer sitting in the stern.

Captain Inglis leaned over the side as the boat drew near.

"Who are you?" demanded the officer in command, in a strong German accent.

"*Cinderella,* Sydney," answered Captain Inglis. "I presume you are really what your name says you are? Sorry I can't pronounce it."

"I am coming on board," said the officer shortly. "I must examine your papers and cargo."

"Very well, I'll lower the gangway for you." The Captain signed for this to be done, and immediately the officer and two sailors came on board.

"This is my chief officer," said Captain Inglis, introducing Richard. "These gentlemen over there are the owners. I am sorry we can't do much in the way of entertainment as this is a strictly temperance ship."

"I am equally sorry to put you to any trouble, sir," replied the German stiffly, "but my Commander, Captain Gluckenstein, has instructions to search all vessels within these waters."

"Far be it from me to object to any officer of the German navy doing his duty," the Captain said, and Stansbury, who had come down from the bridge to swell the numbers on deck, remarked to Thomson, "At least, not while a German cruiser is alongside with ten-inch guns trained on him."

"Then may I ask to see your papers?" continued the officer.

"Certainly; bring the ship's Articles of Registration, Stansbury, and the manifest."

Stansbury brought them, and the partners clustered around to hear the officer's comments.

"*Cinderella,*" he read, spelling the name slowly. "Registered at the Port of Sydney, New South Wales. Steel vessel of two hundred tons. Owner, Tom Grenville. Master's name, Robert Inglis." He glanced down the document and then handed it back. "That is all right," he said. "Now I would like to see your manifest."

"Here it is, sir," said Stansbury. The German took the paper.

"Why!" he exclaimed, "what is this? This is no manifest. It is only a list of stores."

"Which is all we have on board excepting those few items at the bottom, which, as you see, are some articles of machinery for ship-repairing, and several cases of material for the use of shipwrecked people." Stansbury again was the speaker, for being junior officer he was in charge of these matters.

"I must search the ship," said the German. "No ship comes here without having some purpose on hand other than your manifest indicates."

"Then, sir, you are at liberty to do so," said Captain Inglis coldly, and the boys felt a shiver run through them as they thought of their diving gear.

Calling some more sailors on board to assist, the German, aided by another junior officer, made a careful examination of the ship, and found nothing to excite their suspicions till in the forward hold they came across the diver.

"Ah, vat vas dis?" the younger officer cried. His English was not so perfect as the other's.

"Thomson's new patent sounding apparatus," said Stansbury, who accompanied him.

"Vat? Sir William Thomson's new sounder? I haf not seen it yet. Wonderful! Lord Kelvin is a great inventor, truly."

"He is," agreed Stansbury, with a face like a sphinx. "They tell me he is going in for flying-machines now. No, that is not an air-pump, that is where the vacuum is produced which causes the mud at the bottom to rise in this large cylinder."

"And what are these used for?" asked the superior

officer, who had now gone through the entire ship, indicating the mechanical arms.

"Oh, these are for anchoring the sounder to the bottom in a place where there might be currents," answered Stansbury, and the partners, who had now gathered at the foot of the hatch, marvelled at his wonderful inventive abilities.

"I see dere vas a telephone attachment," observed the younger German, who was of a very inquisitive disposition. "I vas never knew dere vas any sounds at the bottom of the sea."

"Oh, yes, sometimes there are," replied Stansbury. "I've heard them myself."

"It is a wonderful piece of mechanism," said the elder admiringly. "What is the inside like?"

"Oh, something like an enormous thermometer. There's a column of mercury in it which rises and falls, and I don't know what else."

"Most remarkable. I suppose we'll be getting them soon for special sounding duties. Why do you use such heavy cables with it? One would almost think a man had to go inside."

"Well, you see, we don't want to risk losing the thing among some rocks or beds of sea vegetation. It is as yet the only one Thomson has constructed."

"Mine Gott! Is he a friend of yours?"

"Rather. He is a great friend of Mr. Grenville, our owner, and we are sort of trying the thing in a way. Doubtless they will be on the market some day."

"Ah yes, I suppose so. Well, we must go. Thanks for your explanation. I take a great interest in these things."

The Germans ascended to the deck, where the officer

turned to Tom and the Captain and said, "Gentlemen, I feel I owe you an apology for this detention, but we've got a lot of regular police-work to do just now. There's a big gang of pirates, or something akin to that, roaming these seas in this vicinity, and we've been ordered to sink them. Of course we knew you had no connection with them, because you did not run away as they have done twice already in the fastest craft I have ever seen, when we appeared; but, do you know, the Commander and some of us were almost convinced we had caught a pearling craft poaching on our preserves when we saw you?"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Captain Inglis. "Your Commander, with all due respect to him, must be very imaginative if he thought any craft could go pearling here. Do you know we are floating just now in a regular hole in the ocean?"

"I believe that. The only land about here rises very steep at any rate. We were off its reef the other night when we thought we had picked up our game. But I must go now. I trust you will not make much of our stopping you in the Australian papers. It was in the interests of the commercial world as much as Germany that we did so."

"Sir, you did your duty," said Captain Inglis, "and if that sometimes is unpleasant, well, I have had to do things myself in the way of duty that I didn't care about, and I know the feeling. We'll make no mention of our being stopped anywhere, although, of course, I must log the fact."

"Oh, surely. I trust, sir, the result of your sounding work will be published soon." The last remark was addressed to Tom.

"You shall have a copy of the first book I write sent you," said Tom, blushing furiously, for he was not used to prevaricating.

"About that island, sir," said the Captain, as the Germans re-entered their pinnace. "Do you mind giving us its position? It is not on my chart."

"One hundred and eighty-five degrees thirty minutes east of Greenwich, and four degrees two minutes three seconds south of the equator," answered the lieutenant. "We did not go ashore, but I fancy you'll find fresh water there. Beware of pirates, though; they may run across you any minute."

The boat departed, and soon after the big cruiser lifted the pinnace to its deck, and with a courteous reply to the lowered flag of the *Cinderella* went off at full speed to the south-east.

Captain Inglis went on the bridge, where Richard and Stansbury had been relieving each other as often as possible, so as to create the impression of their both being on the deck.

"I have often thought," the Captain observed, ringing down "Full speed ahead," "that it is not the man who tells the most lies who is the greatest liar, and I have noticed frequently that a man can often lie more effectively by holding his tongue."

"That sounds like a paradox," said Tom. "Explain, please."

"Well, there's Stansbury, he lied outright, and I'll not say but what he had to; however, he's gifted that way and it was no strain on him, but you lied more than he did by not saying a word."

"How, Captain?" asked Tom in surprise. "I—I did nothing."

"No, that's just it. You said nothing and did nothing. But you wore that university blazer and crest, and the officer concluded you were using this ship for deep-sea sounding. However, I suppose we are, in a way. You can get into your working clothes, gentlemen; the circus is over, and we'll be back to pick up our shell in twenty minutes."

Before the day was done they had recovered their lost shell and diving dress, and about a ton of additional bivalves. Then they went back to their island and slept the sleep of the tired and weary.

Meanwhile the big German cruiser was flying through the seas with searchlight thrown far ahead.

## CHAPTER XI

# Tom has a Strange Adventure

DURING the week that followed the *Cinderella* made daily journeys to the pearling grounds, returning each evening with the spoils won from the ocean bed. A general system of work had now been arranged. The ship left the island every morning soon after daylight when the partners had gone round the opening tables to collect any pearls "cast" during the night, and Ah Sing prepared breakfast while *en route* to the submerged banks. The work of the day was then started, and continued methodically until an hour before sundown, the waters after that becoming too dark for the divers to see properly. Thomson and Powell tried to prolong their available period of work by fitting electric lamps to weighted wires at the control of the operator below, but the slimy eel-like creatures that issued from gloomy cavernous depths and surrounded the diver when the waters became dark proved too much for the nerves of all, and work under such circumstances had to be discontinued. Many strange encounters took place on the deeper levels; sharks, sword-fish, octopoda, and long serpent-like creatures at various times tried conclusions with the diver, but Thomson's arrangement for turning the ocean into a huge electrolyte, with the protected diver and unprotected enemy as electrodes, always decided the battle in favour of its user, until the boys

ceased to pay much attention to any new denizen of the deep that appeared. When they returned to the island at night the shells were discharged and laid in position upon the long inclined platform, the shells which had opened during the day being cleaned and removed to make room for the latest arrivals. Thus the days passed, and pearls and pearl shell accumulated.

Nothing further had been seen or heard of the mysterious residents of the island, and the boys were beginning to forget all about them, although Tom and Richard often wondered vaguely if the other side of the great mountain could reveal anything to them as to the fate of their parents. But the mountain was silent, except for the occasional rumbling sounds which accompanied an eruption.

Twice the *Cinderella* had sighted a smoke cloud on the horizon, and each time had been ready to run, but the smoke passed on in a course which would not bring the steamer producing it within sight of the *Cinderella,* and as the latter showed no smoke herself while at anchor, and was therefore invisible at the distance, the Captain and the partners had kept an eye on the stranger but gone on with their work.

Sunday duly came round, and the *Cinderella* lay safely at her moorings in the sheltered and hidden haven. All were pleased with the week's work, and began to look forward to a voyage to Thursday Island, or even Singapore, to dispose of their shell, and to obtain fresh supplies and equipments. The Captain was telling Richard of the strange religious beliefs of some of the South Sea Islanders when Tom stepped on deck, after having spent an hour cleaning up his cabin; Thomson was reclining in a deck-chair probably thinking out some new

idea; Jack was intently watching the antics of some gaudily-plumaged birds flying about the mast-head; Stansbury was reading an old magazine, and the entire crew were asleep under an improvised awning on the forward deck. Tom did not feel inclined to interrupt any of his comrades and, lowering himself down the rope ladder at the stern, he resolved to have a walk up the covered ravine where he could think over the mystery of his father's disappearance in quietness and peace.

The air was cool and pleasant in the gully, and Tom walked quickly. Soon he reached the fork leading to the Adventurers' depot, but he wished to go up the hill, and so went on. In time he reached the mounted gun and paused to look at it. Thomson had connected his wires, and the gun was loaded and trained on the gap in the outer reef. Tom sat down on the case of ammunition and gazed seawards. As far as the eye could reach the ocean stretched before him, scintillating in the intense sunlight like a mass of sparkling gems. Away to the west he could see where the sunken island lay, and he wondered what chances his partners and he would have had in making any fortune if it had been above water. Clearly, none. The Adventurers would have found it long ago. Then his eyes fell on a tiny dark cloud crawling over the horizon, and he watched it idly for a moment. "That may be the forerunner of the rain clouds," he muttered. "The Captain says the rainy season is already overdue."

Suddenly he sprang to his feet. "It is smoke!" he cried. He turned to rush down to the *Cinderella* to give the news, and then his heart bounded wildly. A figure had jumped out from a crevice in the side of

the ravine, and was running down its bed about two hundred yards in front of him. Instantly Tom forgot the suspicious cloud of smoke and everything else. "Thomson was right after all," he muttered, bounding in pursuit. "I'll see if I can run the fellow down."

Tom was a splendid runner when he had a straight and level course before him, and he was soon conscious that he was gaining on whoever was in front. He was somewhat puzzled, however, by the appearance of the person, and he had made up half the intervening distance before he realised that it was the dress that was strange.

"Why, it looks more like a woman than a man!" he said to himself. "That is the reason I am gaining so much."

The figure turned into a smaller gully leading out of the deep cleft about a hundred yards above the main fork, but Tom was too close to be misled, and followed without hesitation. "By Jupiter! It *is* a girl!" he ejaculated a minute later. "What is she doing here?" He could hear her laboured breathing now, and he saw that her flowing hair was long and black. With an increased effort he almost gained her side, then he slackened his pace abruptly. "Why!" he muttered, "what am I doing? What right have I to chase a girl this way even although we are on a south-sea island. She is probably a native and was watching me out of sheer curiosity."

But she was not a native. She suddenly stopped, and Tom found himself staring at the prettiest girl he had ever seen. Her face was flushed with her exertions, and her eyes flashed dangerously. Incidentally Tom was also looking down the tube of a revolver she held

in her hand. She appeared to be about seventeen. Tom halted with a suddenness equal to her own.

"If you come another step I will shoot you," she said in tones which charmed Tom's heart on the spot.

He raised his helmet with an intuitive politeness, but so surprised was he that he could not speak for a moment. How imperious were her looks, her voice and bearing, and how most remarkably strange that she should be on a south-sea island instead of in a royal court. But she was waiting for him to speak, and as he looked at her a light dawned on him and thrilled him with strange emotion.

"I beg your pardon," he said, calling his natural coolness to his aid by an effort of will. "I am very sorry that my behaviour was so rude, but I really did not know you were a girl until a moment before you turned, and even then I did not dream you were an English girl."

"Indeed," replied the girl scornfully. "Well, now that you have made the discovery do you intend to go back to your gang, or am I to shoot you?"

Tom smiled, "You may shoot if you like," he said, "but wouldn't that be a much easier task if you loaded your weapon first?"

"How do you know it is not loaded?" she demanded, allowing her revolver to drop slightly, but bringing it back again quickly.

"I didn't know when I spoke, but of course it is fairly evident now that I was right. Here, take mine, if you are still afraid of me." Tom drew his own revolver from his belt and handed it to her ceremoniously.

"Thank you," she said, somewhat mollified. "I will take the cartridges if you do not mind. We are out of

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"IF YOU COME ANOTHER STEP I WILL SHOOT YOU," SHE SAID

them at present." As she spoke she opened the breech of Tom's Smith and Wesson and ejected the charge, then picking up the scattered cartridges she deftly loaded her own with them, Tom watching her meanwhile with great interest. When she had finished she turned to Tom and said, "I must request you to leave me. I really *can shoot* and I do not wish to kill you. It was very kind of you to give me the cartridges."

"Oh, I can give you cases of them," Tom replied airily, ignoring her first words. "But will you not allow me to introduce myself?"

"I do not wish to know you, sir. Your people are our enemies and will suffer severely for what they have done to us. We are not so helpless as you think."

"I am indeed glad to know that you are not helpless," replied Tom, "but you mistake when you say we are your enemies, as I think I can easily prove to you. And I am not going away."

"If Mr. Murray even sees you he will not rest until he has killed you."

"Who is Mr. Murray? I wasn't aware that this delightful island contained such fearful people."

"Mr. Murray is not a fearful person. He is a gentleman, and has been very good to me."

"Then, Miss Preston, suppose we go together and interview him?"

"What! I go with you? Then your gang have really started to make war on women? I will not go with you, but I will shoot you."

"You said that before, my dear girl—pardon the familiarity, but I am not much accustomed to dealing with young ladies—and notwithstanding the knowledge that you now can shoot, I am going with you. Your

brother is my comrade, and on his behalf I am going to take care of you until I place you in his charge——"

"What do you mean? My brother! Where is he? He is not a member of your gang too?"

"He is very much a member, he is a partner; but we are not a gang of scoundrels like the people you are thinking of. We are their sworn enemies and came here to look for you, your father, and my father——"

"Oh! Then who are you?"

"Tom Grenville."

"What! Captain Grenville's son?" She peered into his face with large inquiring eyes and then cried, "Yes, I see the resemblance. We are saved! Come quickly. We must tell Mr. Murray." Then like a woman she burst into tears and sobbed bitterly, "Oh, why did you not come sooner?" she murmured. "You are too late now."

Tom did not quite know what to do. He could deal with men, be they friend or foe, but when it came to beautiful sobbing young ladies he was at a disadvantage.

"Let us go to your people," he said impulsively, taking her hand in his own. "We have a steamer here and everything ready for you, and we can send the pirates to the bottom of the sea if they come near this island."

Suddenly she stopped crying and looked up in his face, but she did not withdraw her hand. "Have you really got men and guns on your ship?" she asked, and then probably for the first time she noticed that Tom was an extremely handsome youth.

"We have," he answered. "We rather fancy we can risk a fight with the wreckers any day. Why, Thomson will invent something to cause their boat to

sink or their guns to burst, whenever they get near us. He is a wonderful fellow. Powell can do his share of that sort of work too, and Jack will make some powerful explosive which will make them think a volcano has burst under them. Then there is Captain Inglis, who will fight any two of them single-handed, and Stansbury, and Richard your brother who can do anything. We have also Kotay, who is wonderfully smart, and at least a couple of Manillamen who can be relied upon."

"You have not said anything about yourself." She looked into his eyes innocently.

"Oh, I am not much use," he said deprecatingly. "But tell me, how many people are there with you?"

"Only Mr. Murray the engineer, and myself now. Last week they took away my father and Captain Grenville while we were out trapping some pigs——"

Tom's heart sank. "Last week?" he cried. "Were you all together until last week?"

"Yes, they wanted to know where some island was, and took them away to show them."

Tom thought rapidly, and he recalled the conversation Thomson and he had overheard in the Adventurers' depot. They were to sail in parallel courses east and west, and if unsuccessful make endeavour to compel Captain Grenville to find the island for them. Hope again rose high within him, and he realised what the sinking of the island now meant. The Adventurers would sail about the spot looking for it, and of course would not find it, and if his father really did tell them the exact spot they would have to make preparations for diving for the shell, which would necessitate their return to their depot. At any rate they would have to spend considerable time diving, and meanwhile the *Cin-*

*derella* could depart in search of the German cruiser and inform its Commander of the whereabouts of the pirates. Retribution would thus be brought about; Richard and he would have their parents restored, and all would end happily.

Yet it was very pleasant just now walking along the shaded rock cleft hand in hand with his fair companion. What would his comrades say when he brought her back with him, and who was this Murray?

Suddenly a thought struck him. "Our ship is only about a mile away," he said. "Perhaps you would like to come down to it with me? We have ladies' shoes and dresses on board——"

He stopped. His companion was blushing furiously, and he saw that he had made a mistake in alluding to such matters, although he was prompted by the rather strange material of which his companion's dress was made, and the knowledge that her shoes were improvised from the skins of some animal.

"Oh no," she stammered, "I must go and dress first. I couldn't go among such a number of gentlemen like this."

Tom did not quite see why she couldn't, and wondered vaguely what dressing meant on a south-sea island. "As you wish," he said, "but we must get this Mr. Murray and you on board as soon as possible so that we can take you to a safe place. By Jupiter! your brother will be surprised when he sees you. I will have my cabin altered for you; it is the best on the ship."

"Are there any ladies in your party?" she asked, as he helped her up the sides on to a pad leading across the face of the slope.

"Well, no," he answered, wondering how they had neglected to have a companion for Miss Preston with them. "You see, ours is not a pleasure party. We left Britain on a pearl-fishing adventure and we are all boys —men, I mean—but Captain Inglis and Stansbury have plenty of lady friends, and we'll get some of them to keep you company."

"I don't need any one for a companion," she pouted. "I am not a school-girl, although Mr. Murray gives me lessons every day. I can cook and do lots of things."

"But you will not have to do anything. There are surely enough of us to see that our only lady guest is well attended. Besides, we will leave you at Cooktown while we go in search of Mr. Preston and my father."

"Then you do not want me with you? You seem very eager to get me left somewhere. I will not stay anywhere while you and my brother and your friends are looking for my father. I am coming with you, I don't care what you do, so there!"

Tom was again nonplussed. He felt he would like to tell her that nothing would give him greater pleasure than to have her always with them, but he knew that would not be the proper thing to say, and besides, there would be Thomson and Powell and Davis always annoying her. They walked on in silence.

"Why do you not speak, Mr. Grenville? Are you tired of me already?"

Tom started. "Please do not call me that again. I hardly knew you were speaking to me. My name is Tom."

"Oh, how nice; I like Tom."

"You have not told me yours."

"Flora is my name, but I don't know that we have known each other long enough to call each other by our Christian names—I'll ask Mr. Murray."

"Hang Mr. Murray!" exclaimed Tom. "On a desert island we can do what we like. We can be as formal as you please when we reach civilised ports again."

"Very well, Tom, it is agreed. But you must wait here now until I go on and tell Mr. Murray what has happened. He might shoot you if he saw you coming along with me. He is on the watch night and day——"

"By Jupiter, Flora," said Tom, "there may be two of us shooting before long!"

"There, you are jealous already;" she laughed and ran out into the open. But Tom would not stay behind. He was not afraid of any man, and did not see why he should hide from this wonderful Mr. Murray. He also stepped out from the forest vegetation and looked around. He was surprised. A little way in front of him lay the scene of their fruitless search only a week before; he knew they had been rising considerably during the latter part of their journey along the bush pad, but he had had no idea they were crossing it to the eastern side of the island. A moment's reflection, however, showed what might have been observed before had not every one been so much engaged. The mountain fell away at a much steeper angle on the eastern slope, and several miles of flat wooded country stretched from its base to the beach. This of course they had known, but it had not struck any of them that so many miles' travel from the shore ought to have brought them to within a couple of miles or so from the head of the inlet on the other side.

His father, then, and Mr. Preston and Flora had been close to them after all. "Oh, why," he asked himself, "did we not explore the island thoroughly at first?" He did not remember that they had done so to the best of their ability. But he was not given much time to think over the strange workings of fate. With a start he realised that Flora had disappeared somewhere; a moment before she had been in full view running over the ground where the fires had been, but now it was as if the ground had swallowed her.

He ran towards the wall of rocks where he had seen her last, but her moccasined feet had left no track on the hard ground, and while he looked round a voice above him spoke.

"Just bide where you are, ma man, till I examine your credentials," it said, and looking up Tom saw a middle-aged man with a steel-grey beard perched in a slight fissure in the rocks. He held a shot gun across his knee, the muzzle pointed in Tom's direction. A thrill of joy shot through Tom's being. There were only two people in the place, and this elderly ungainly person must be Mr. Murray.

"Oh, they're all right, Mr. Murray," gaily responded Tom. "You may put down your gun."

"I dinna ken about that. You're vera free wi' my name for a stranger. When did the gang begin to enlist boys in their dirty work?"

"I am not a member of any gang. I am Tom Grenville, the son of Captain Grenville of the *Southern Cross,* and with some more boys have come to look for him and his companions."

"Eh, what did you say?" cried the Scot in astonishment. "Na, na, it will no' dae; try some other yarn.

I am a bit too old in the horn to be caught wi' a story like that. Staund still, or I'll blow your heid into the gully there."

"Very well," said Tom, throwing himself on the ground. "Miss Preston will explain things, and when you have quite satisfied yourself as to my being who I've said, let me know."

And he did know very soon. He had cast his gaze seawards, and was calculating the distance between their present position and the nearest civilised port—he was not quite certain whether it was Samarai or Cooktown—when Murray stood beside him, his face beaming with smiles of gladness.

"Eh, ma laddie," he cried, grasping both Tom's hands in his own great horny ones, "I did ye an injustice the noo. Miss Flora has just told me that you're wi' her brother Richard, an' that you've been looking for us for some time. Noo that I see your face, too, I ken ye fine; you are verra like the Captain. But if you have a boat o' ony kind, tak' me awa' to some place where I can gather some men together. I've sworn to dee on deck or get the Captain and Mr. Preston oot o' their hands."

"The men are here now, Mr. Murray; our boat is moored only about two miles from here. But why did you not show yourselves last week, when we came up here looking for you?"

"Haud your tongue, laddie. Ye dinna ken what I have gone through this last few days wi' that wee lassie to protect at a' costs. Some time ago, when we were together, a ship sailed inside the reef doon there flying signals which read, 'Show lights, we are coming back.' That caused great excitement, for we had long given up hope of any ship comin' this way, an' had no signal-

ling apparatus to reply. However, we built big fires and kept them burning, and then one afternoon, when Miss Flora an' me were out trapping some pigs, for we had no ammunition, a gang o' the cut-throats we had been hiding frae so long—at least I expect it was them, for no others kent of our existence—rushed oot o' the timber doon there an' took Captain Grenville an' Mr. Preston away wi' them. When we came back we found signs o' the struggle an' that was all. We saw a boat wi' no lights lying inside the reef, an' thinking they might come back, I put oot the dying fires an' we kept in our den. Next day a crowd of them came up looking for us, an' we lay up there an' watched them. It wanna altogether because we were frightened that we kept out o' the way, however; for the day before Miss Flora discovered that the pirates had erected a gun on the other side, and we had determined to sink them wi' their ain gun the first chance we had. We saw them coming in last night, and Flora went along to-day—she's fleeter in the feet than me—to see where they were, but I havena heard her story yet."

"Tea is ready now. Please come at once," cried a joyous voice from the rocks above, and Flora appeared where Tom had first seen Murray, dressed in what seemed to Tom most wonderful garments.

"Come along," said Murray. "This is our front door; it's only open when the ladder is doon; but our back door in the gully over there is always open, although we have hidden it as well as we could."

Following his Scotch companion, Tom climbed up the rope ladder to the fissure in the rocks, and found himself looking into a large cave extending far back into the mountain.

"We didna always bide here," Murray said. "At first we lived doon on the beach, but when the peak burst out, as it does every three months, we were driven away wi' the lava stream, an' came up here to be inside the circle o' falling ashes."

"It is not often we have visitors, Tom—Mr. Grenville," said Flora, as Murray finished, "and I am afraid we are not accustomed to entertaining. Still on south-sea islands one can't expect too much. Will you have a cup of tea, or a cup of my own preparation?"

"Your own preparation, by all means," answered Tom gallantly. "What is it?"

"You should have asked that first, my lord, it is what Mr. Murray calls a saturated solution of—of—Do pronounce it for me, Mr. Murray."

"Of Piper methysticum," said Murray, "and it is about as strange a drink as I know. Kava, some folk call it."

Tom tried it, however, and afterwards agreed with his Scotch friend, for he could hardly stand on his feet, and his head felt the size of a balloon.

"We have plenty of stores," continued Flora after a time, "for the people who left us here also left a whole shipload of things, and told my father that whenever we wanted more if we made a signal with fires they would see it and attend to it. We never did so though, for we thought we might escape some day if they didn't know where we were. Mr. Murray has already built a boat; it is hidden down near the beach."

"Ay, and we were just thinking about settin' oot for some o' the Prince Bismarck islands when the Captain and Mr. Preston were taken away," added Murray.

"We'll pay them back for that soon," said Tom.

"If you have anything you wish to take with you, pack it up. We must get on board before dark so as to get everything ready. By Jupiter! won't they be surprised when they see us? We'll make the Adventurers sorry for their conduct before long."

"They were a half-gentlemanly lot too," mused Murray. "They didna maroon us for good, they said, but just until they had finished wi' that pearl island."

"Do you know it?" asked Tom.

"Oh yes, but I wasna going to tell them. The Captain, Mr. Preston and I intended to fit out an expedition to work its pearl beds as soon as Mr. Preston could get a concession from the German Government. It was a strange sort of coral atoll. It didna rise more than three feet above the surface anywhere, but on the ledges round it we could see the shells quite plainly through the water. It was just after leaving the island that my second and the chief officer came out in their true colours. They were evidently members of some secret society o' wreckers. To cut it short, they got command o' the ship an' put us ashore on this island. It seems they first intended only to steal the ship, but afterwards their headquarters decided to work the pearl deposits o' the island. That is all I ken, but I don't think they found the place, for I know they offered to land us at any port in New Zealand or Australia, regularly, for a long time after that, if the Captain would tell them its position. But he never did so, and in time we began to be quite happy on our island. This lasted until about a month ago, when a new gang o' the beggars began to come about, and finished up wi' what ye ken, and now we are all that is left. But tell me, how did you ken to come here to look for us?"

"I received a message which my father cast into the sea in a bottle. Some one picked it up near Napier in New Zealand and sent it on. He said nothing about being marooned, though."

"It is maist remarkable how Providence works. I suppose he didna ken at the time what was going to happen. We've thrown many messages into the sea since then telling our position, but they never got outside the lagoon."

While speaking, Murray had been making preparations for departure, and now Flora came up with a bundle of her most precious belongings.

"You never said what you think of my dress," she said to Tom.

"I think it is a dream of beauty," he responded, "but isn't it a bit—er—well, short?" Tom hesitated; he did not know much about feminine garments, and feared he had already committed some grave blunder. But if so, Flora did not seem to notice.

"Why, no," she replied, laughing. "If it were any longer I should be treading on it." She departed, still amused at Tom's idea of dresses, and Murray remarked:

"Poor wee lassie, that was her best dress when she left England about six years ago, and it never seems to strike her that she has grown into a woman since then."

They were now ready to depart, and after many last looks round and farewells they finally left by the way which opened into the gully. Flora led the way, and they hurried on, hoping to get down to the *Cinderella* before sundown.

"We'd better, I'm thinking," said Murray, "for it

strikes me the rain will come on to-night and everything no' under cover o' some kind will be drooned."

"I wonder what Richard will say when he sees me," cried Flora gaily. "Is he tall and handsome like—like——" she blushed and did not complete her sentence.

"Yes, he is tall, and handsome, and very clever," answered Tom, also blushing for some reason or other. "But we are nearly down now. The *Cinderella* lies at the bottom of this ravine."

"I think I smell an oyster factory," said Murray, sniffing the air, "but I couldna see ony masts or signs o' a ship frae that clear place we passed before turnin' doon here."

"It is very difficult to see any distance in this part of the world either on shore or at sea; the vegetation is too dense in the first case, and the haze hides everything in the second."

"Vera true. I believe I can smell the engine-room noo," remarked Murray. "The smell o' an oil rag will be better than eau-de-Cologne to me."

"Then we are just down," said Tom enthusiastically. "The *Cinderella* lies there."

"Where did ye say? I canna see onything but pearl-shell tables."

"Why, look at——" said Tom as he passed into the open, but the words froze on his lips, and he stared at a vacant mooring place. The *Cinderella* was not there.

## CHAPTER XII

# Bearding the Lions in their Den

Tom stood as one in a dream. What new trick was this Fate was playing on him?

"Can't you see her?" he cried. "My senses must be going wrong. I left her moored there this morning, but I see nothing of her now."

"Because she's no' there, my lad," said Murray kindly. "They have cleared out for some reason we'll likely know soon. I hardly thought the pirates would be so easily managed. I expect they have some hand in this."

"I say, boss, is that you?" cried a voice from the forest which Tom at once recognized.

"Yes, Kotay. Where is the *Cinderella?* What has happened?"

"Lot of fellows from boat outside rush our boat when most people have afternoon sleep. I was on shore catching ducks when it happened. I climbed tree and waited for you. Big ship outside now."

"Is there?" said Tom, with a strange note in his voice. "Then I will know all about this affair before the night is over."

"Good job we built house here last week," remarked Kotay, coming forward; "else how we do with lady? Rain come to-night."

Tom turned to Murray. "I am more than sorry,"

he said, "that this is what I have brought you to. You have heard what has happened. Now, this is no time for sentiment or regret. If you will kindly take Miss Preston back to your old home again, I will see what I can do with that other ship to-night."

"Miss Preston is not going back, thank you," said that lady calmly. "She is going to help in whatever is to be done here."

"Nonsense," cried Tom angrily. "Girls are only in the way. You must go back. I am going out to the ship which Kotay says is lying outside the reef."

"And I am going with you," said Murray quietly.

"You bet I am not goin' to stay behind," added Kotay. "Blamed wet to-night on shore."

"And I'm going too," said Miss Preston. "I can pull a boat as well as any man."

"But that is just the trouble," said Tom; "we have no boat to pull. I am going to swim." He spoke quite roughly, for the plan he had in his mind was not one in which girls found any place; it was daring in the extreme. Miss Preston did not answer.

"I think other fellows come ashore in boat they leave behind down on beach," put in Kotay. "I will go an' get it, an' come back for you."

"No, Kotay, lead us to it rather. We have just time to follow this inlet to the beach before sundown."

The little man started off at once without comment of any kind, and the rest of the party followed. The route chosen by Kotay was along the banks of the inlet, and proved to be of a much more passable nature than Tom had expected. When passing the opening tables, Tom pointed out to Murray the ends of the wires Thomson had laid for firing the gun electrically.

He also showed Miss Preston quite a number of pearls which had been "cast" during the day, lying in the ledge, and told her she could take as many as she wished. But this was no time for courtesies; Tom's gallantry of the day had given place to sterner feelings, and in Miss Preston he only saw a helpless girl who would hamper his actions very much. He did his best to be polite, however, and eventually they reached the beach, and saw a large steamer lying just outside the gap.

Then night came on, and strange flashes of fire shot across the heavens at short intervals. Quietly they took possession of the boat. It was a large one and not easily handled, but at length they succeeded in floating it. Then Tom said:

"Miss Preston, Mr. Murray, and Kotay, without making a speech or going over what might have been, or in any way wasting time with vain regrets, I will tell you my plan of action, and if any of you can suggest improvements, then by all means do so. I propose that I get out to that ship. Kotay will go with me to the reef, and from there I will swim. Now, I conclude that they must have sent most of their people to capture the *Cinderella,* for they did not know how many men we had and would not take risks, therefore there cannot be a great number on board now. I will climb on deck somehow, and hide until I know the exact state of affairs. Then I will find out where my father and Mr. Preston are—they must be on board somewhere—and liberate them. We can then all drop overboard when no one is about, swim to the reef where Kotay will be waiting, and reach the

shore before, perhaps, any of the people on board know that anything has happened.

"And then they will send a murdering party on shore after us," said Murray, "and——"

"But before they can do so we can be up on the hill beside our gun, and will blow them out of the water at the first signs of movement."

"Kotay like that," remarked the Japanese; "only he no' like waitin' on reef until you come back; boat wait there itself an' I come too."

"Your plan is good, my boy, and worthy of you," said Murray after a space of silence, "but ye seem to have forgotten that I am in the land o' the living, for your scheme gives me no part to play."

"Why, you will look after Miss Preston, of course."

"Miss Preston will look after herself," spoke that lady coldly.

"Well, here's the first o' the rain coming, so come back under the trees and I'll mak' ane or twa amendments."

A loud crash of thunder reverberated among the gullies, and a vivid flash of lightning illumined the sea. Next moment the long-delayed rain burst in a terrific downpour over all.

The party moved into the friendly shelter of the dense vegetation and waited until the noise of the rain among the tree-tops should abate, so that they could hear themselves talking. Kotay meanwhile, after having vainly tried to make himself understood, had disappeared, and the trio peered into the darkness and waited. Suddenly the rain stopped, and an intense silence fell over the land. It was the calm before another outburst;

but taking advantage of it Murray began: "You were right when you said there can't be many people on board, my laddie, and, from what I know of their kind, all the crew will be helplessly intoxicated just now. I propose, therefore, that we stick to your plan so far as getting on board and liberating Captain Grenville and Mr. Preston is concerned; but I would add that I am going too, and when we get that done we'll consider whether or not we'll hold the ship against all odds."

"Capital!" cried Miss Preston. "Then I can come too."

"Oh no, no!" exclaimed Tom; "that would never do. This is no game that girls can play. I would like Mr. Murray with me, but you will have to stay with Kotay."

"Indeed, I will not, sir. I am as much interested in those on that ship as you, and if you won't allow me to help in your plan I will set about doing something independently."

"Can girls not listen to reason?" said Tom petulantly. "You cannot possibly help us, and will only hamper us because we shall have to attend to you."

"Oh no, you will not. I can do all that you first proposed that the little Japanese should do. I can wait on the reef with the boat ready to take you all away again, and do anything I am told just the same as if I were a man."

"The lassie is no far wrong," said Murray. "She can be trusted not to cause us ony trouble, an' could at least wait by the boat if Kotay is any use to us in the other work."

"Kotay has proved himself very useful before," said

Tom; "but this adventure is one in which I have no right to ask his assistance."

"Then gie me some o' your cartridges an' we'll go without him. I wish we had some ropes, though,"

There was a pattering of feet on the beach, and Kotay broke into the sheltered spot where they were standing, loaded with a heterogeneous assortment of guns, knives, ropes, and tinned food-stuffs.

"I steal this from other fellows' stores in house along the beach," he said. "Think you want them, my word! We are ready now." While he spoke he was opening the tins with his knife, and soon he had passed round slices of what tasted like plum-pudding, but it was too dark for any one to see. Then the rain came on again, the lightning flashed, and the thunder shook the island. But no one minded the war of the elements; the fiercer they raged the more chance the party had of success; and after finally arranging their course of action, in which both Kotay and Miss Preston were given parts, they moved out of their shelter and walked down to the boat. Dimly in the distance a few lights shone through the port-holes of the vessel they were going to attack, but otherwise she was shrouded in the darkness of the storm, until a lightning flash at intervals would reveal her long low form standing out against the great banks of clouds beyond the reef, as if she had been projected on a screen by a powerful lantern.

Thanks to Kotay's journey, the party were enabled to arm themselves with a couple of heavy revolvers each, and coils of rope and other weapons and gear lay in the bottom of the boat for use if required.

But the waters of the lagoon were beginning to lash

themselves spitefully in sympathy with the wild waste of heaving water outside the boiling foam circle, and it was all Tom, Murray, and Kotay could do to prevent themselves from being hurled back on the beach. Miss Preston took the tiller ropes and kept their head towards the reef, and for an hour the three men fought, amidst the tropical rain-storm, and against a powerful shoreward swell that had risen, to reach it.

Success at length crowned their efforts, and they stood in the drenching spray behind a mighty wall of boiling surf. The roar of the storm drowned all attempts at conversation; but they did not need to talk now, they knew their parts. Murray uncoiled a long rope and hitched it to the stern of the boat, then fastening the free end under his arms, he looked round to see if all were ready for the next stage. They were. Miss Preston was to remain by the boat in the heart of the spray and await results. Murray would fasten his end of the rope to the ship to facilitate a return journey, and for the rest they trusted to Providence to see them through. Headlong the old engineer plunged into the towering mountains of foam closely followed by Tom and Kotay; the Jap carried a knife in his teeth as his only weapon, but Tom and Murray each had his revolvers safely stowed away in water-tight holsters strapped to their belts.

Well might the people on board the steamer think themselves safe from a land attack that night. Securely anchored they lay in open water just beyond the deadly place of strife where sea and reef fought for mastery. Nothing floating could pass that zone, and besides they had already captured the only other craft in that part of the Pacific at the time. Yet it was

surely a strange watch they kept. Where were the crew, the officers—in fact, where was any one? The rain-swept decks were deserted, all lights were out, and only a glimmering ray which issued from a port-hole opening on deck in the after-poop showed any signs that the vessel was not an abandoned craft.

In the cabin from which the light issued four men sat round a table playing cards. These were Sir Robert, who seemed bored, Crosswood, and two strangers, evidently the Captain or chief navigating officer of the ship, and one of the leading members of the Adventurers.

"I think, Sir Robert," said the last individual, dealing out the cards again, "you must admit that smart and all as vas our wonderful boys, they vas only what you call fools all the time. How else do we catch them on—on the hop, you say—so easily?"

Sir Robert smiled, but made no answer.

"I am of opinion the strength of the boys was greatly exaggerated," remarked the ship's officer. "That marvellous yarn cabled us to Cooktown from Sydney always seemed to me too much like the work of some imaginative reporter to be worth our serious attention, and such has proved to be the case."

"Yes," observed Crosswood; "this is our first passage at arms with them, and they went down without the slightest resistance. The Twentieth Century Adventurers are once more supreme on the face of the waters."

"Vot about your flag dat braved von thousand years?" sneeringly asked the fourth man.

"Oh, I fancy it can still make good its boast so far as other nations are concerned," replied Crosswood.

"Britannia still rules the waves, despite the feverish warship-building craze in Kaiserland, and you may go nap on the fact that when we run foul of the British Navy I am one that sends in my resignation as an active member of the Adventurers by the first post."

"You vas mean to say dat Chermany does not count?" inquired the first speaker with just a trace of irritation in his voice.

"Er—suppose you come back to the boys," drawled Sir Robert. "It is common ground. We Adventurers have nothing to do with any one nation more than another, unless perhaps the one with the biggest tramp fleet or the greatest area of unpatrolled sea."

"Then what are we to do with Captain Grenville and Preston?" asked the officer. "We can't carry them over the ocean forever, and if they really ever knew, they apparently either don't know now or won't tell us where that island lies."

"Shoot them," said the German, "it is safest."

"Not so," interjected Sir Robert. "Our Society prides itself on being gentlemen adventurers, not common murderers. It seems to me that now we have got those who do know where the island is, our interest in the gentlemen you have just mentioned is finished. I would suggest landing them at some New Zealand port and giving them our blessing. No one would ever believe what they said."

"At any rate, we have got the boys with their knowledge, their ship, Captain, and crew," said Crosswood. "And I suppose we can easily make them tell everything they know. I would propose that we hide our own craft somewhere convenient and work the

pearl-shell deposits from their ship. We could make them do most of the work for us."

"Could you?" The speaker was Sir Robert.

"Why not?" asked the officer. "I know Inglis, their skipper. He is a broken-down beggar who lost his ticket for sand-scraping somewhere. He could be bought if necessary for a few pounds. As for the boys, we'll give them a good thrashing to begin with, and after that all will be plain sailing."

"I have not had the pleasure of meeting the young gentlemen," Sir Robert remarked; "but I am prepared to risk my reputation for veracity by asserting that we have not yet got the upper hand of them. The people who put that floating notice there are not fools, but we shall certainly prove ourselves to belong to the class which comprises most human beings if we underrate their powers. Ah! I hear the watch on deck once more. I am glad, Captain, that you have one man on board able to attend to his duty."

"Yes, I think Smith will keep sober," returned the officer. "You are aware, Sir Robert, that we cannot deal harshly with our men. It might be awkward, and we promised them a night to themselves with unlimited grog allowance when we got the *Cinderella* into our hands."

"Oh, I am not putting forward any objections, Captain, I am merely commenting with some surprise on the fact that we've still got one man able to walk the deck on board. I know all our tried men are with Herr Buelon, Bankstone, and the others on that craft."

"They were lucky in getting her out through the

gap before the storm came on," said the German. "Nodink with screw propellers could come out in the teeth of that hurricane now."

"And they might have found the boys a bit troublesome on shore if they had had to stay with them," laughed Crosswood.

"Ah well, gentlemen," drawled Sir Robert, throwing down his cards, "our play has degenerated to almost that of an old maid's whist-party. Let us banish the boys from our memory just now and confine our attention to the game. Smith will prevent their ghosts from coming here."

The party filled their glasses, lit their cigars, and resumed their play. Evidently it was for high stakes, for the pile of gold beside Sir Robert rapidly increased, while that of the others correspondingly decreased.

"I don't hear Smith now," remarked Crosswood after a long silence.

"No," laughed the German, pushing over another handful of sovereigns to Sir Robert. "He vas just gone below for more rum. I think I hear him go. Ach, Sir Robert, you haf all the luck to-night." He dealt the cards again, nevertheless, and the play went on.

Meanwhile things were not just as they imagined throughout the ship. It certainly had been the man Smith the card-players had heard, but the cessation of his footsteps was not due to his having gone below. That was brought about by Murray. The man had paced the length of the deck perhaps twice, and was crossing the well-deck space between the fore-poop and 'midships when a dripping form sprang out of the darkness and gripped him by the throat. The man uttered

no sound, Murray's grip was too sure to allow that, and next moment he was gagged and bound by two other figures who rose drenched and splashing from the sea.

Throwing the man into a corner the three strangers then cautiously crept round the ship, and, at the very moment when Sir Robert had requested his companions to forget the boys for a time, one of them was peering through the open deck-view port-hole at him.

"This is the old *Southern Cross,*" whispered Murray in Tom's ear. "I know where the prisoners will be. Come, the crew are all helpless."

"But what about those inside?" asked Tom, a strange feeling coming over him as he realised that he was standing on the ship his father had commanded.

Murray looked through the port-hole. "They'll play all night," he whispered. "But I dinna like chancing anything." He hesitated.

"Then I'll keep guard here," said Tom. "Take Kotay and look for my father and Mr. Preston. Fire your revolvers twice if we have to run for it, and I will jump overboard too, but until I get that signal I will stay here."

Murray and Kotay glided away, and Tom pressed himself into the shadows, against the gunwale, gripped its edge to steady himself, for the vessel was rolling considerably in the increasing swell and slowly worked himself into a position which enabled him to look through the open port and yet be almost completely hidden himself. He then raised his free hand and rested it on the outside flange of the port. In that hand was a heavy Colt revolver, and its muzzle pointed straight at the heart of Sir Robert. The game went

on inside, but now a terribly-in-earnest watcher, grim and silent, saw their every action, heard all their conversation. Meanwhile, out on the bare reef, amidst clouds of bursting spray, and the thunderous roar of the breakers, a young girl stood alone, waiting.

Half an hour passed, and Tom changed his hands, his right now gripping the gunwale and his left the revolver. Another half-hour and he changed again. Then he was conscious that some one was stealthily approaching. Tom balanced himself on his erratic foothold, leant against the gunwale for support, and drew his other revolver with his free hand. Next minute he replaced his second weapon and assumed his old position; the person creeping along the deck had said in a suppressed voice, "Mister Tom, Mister Tom, where are you?"

Tom bent low on the deck. "Here," he whispered. "Don't speak above your breath. What is it?"

The Japanese gained his side. "We've found them. Big Scotch fellow tell me tell you all ready, crew all shut down, can no' get up. What me to do now?—Sh."

A man walked along the deck and made as if to open the door of the saloon cabin where the gamblers played. But he never did so. Something flew out at him from the darkness of night and he knew no more. But he did not fall; Kotay knew too much to allow that. By some miraculous feat of strength the little man threw his heavy victim over his shoulder and walked away forward with him, and again Tom was alone, unless something lurked in the darkness beside him.

The lightning flashed, the thunder rent the atmosphere, and the rain came down in torrents; still Tom

kept his vigil, and the lonely girl on the reef did the same.

Many times inside the warm saloon had the glasses been refilled, but now there seemed to be no further demand for refreshment, and three of the occupants dropped asleep, leaving Sir Robert with an enormous pile of sovereigns by his side. Then that gentleman arose and stretched himself. "Pigs!" he muttered, glancing contemptuously at his companions round the table. "No wonder our Society has degenerated when such as these things are in control." He swept the gold carelessly into his pockets and sat down again. "I suppose I am the only being with full senses on board to-night. I wish I had some capable men, for this storm will drive us on that reef despite all our anchors if it gets much worse. Ah, well—" he pressed the button of an electric bell, and Tom once more held his two revolvers in readiness—"these wonderful boys and their ship are in our hands after all. I feel quite sorry they didn't put up a bigger fight. I rather liked them although I have never seen them, and now that we have them of course we'll get that confounded island, and I'll have to look for adventure in some other part of the globe. I think I will reorganise our band, get rid of all these swine, and start over again as gentlemen adventurers. Jove! I wonder if I could persuade some of the boys to join us; they have brains at least. A pity they fell into Herr Buelon's hands so easily. However, he is a gentleman and won't allow them to be ill-treated. They were smart, too, for youngsters; Bankstone and Charlie could never sleep even at sea unless a double watch was set, for fear they would find the young electricians standing over them

when they awoke. But this place is getting very stuffy, and as no one seems able to answer that bell, I'll take a stretch on deck." He rose and walked towards the door, but a flash of something bright in the port-hole attracted his eyes, and he stood and stared in bewilderment. He rubbed his eyes and looked again. It was still there, a motionless revolver and a steady hand behind with a finger on the trigger. Sir Robert recoiled a step and blinked at the apparition. He could see nothing beyond the hand; outside was the dense blackness of night. The vessel rolled and tossed in the storm, but the revolver remained stationary in the port-hole, and its muzzle covered his heart.

"Dear me!" he laughed, "I thought I was sober; but I am as bad as my friends here. I'll have those boys on my nerves soon. Of course it is only a trick of my fancy; I must really be more careful in what I drink. How it points, though. I am half-hypnotised by its glittering barrel. Tuts! this will never do. I am going out." He again walked determinedly towards the door; but again he stopped, and a strange fear of something supernatural assailed him. The revolver and hand had been pushed farther through, and he distinctly heard the click that accompanied its being raised to full cock preparatory to firing.

He pulled himself together. "Nonsense!" he exclaimed. "There must be a man behind that revolver; it couldn't click if it was only imaginary. But, by George! there is only the flicker of an eyelid or a breath of air between me and Kingdom Come just now."

"Quite correct, Sir Robert," said a voice from the darkness. "And now that you are aware of that fact,

perhaps you will resume your seat. My hand is shaking, and this is a hair trigger."

Sir Robert's face brightened, and he threw himself upon a couch with a laugh. "By George! but you did give me a bit of a funny feeling," he said. "I thought my senses had gone wrong."

He got no answer. Tom was not in a mood for conversation at the time; he was listening for sounds that would indicate the success or failure of their daring enterprise. Sir Robert moved suddenly, however, and the weapon came into line with his heart again at once.

"The next time you move, Sir Robert," Tom said, "I intend to fire. And you may take your hand off that bell-push. Your men are all battened down, and will only be shot if they make any attempt to come on deck."

"Ah, thanks," responded the prisoner; "I did not fully grasp the situation. Just allow me to reach for and light a cigar, will you? Thank you. I shan't move again unless I fall asleep; but won't you come in? It must be cold out there just now. You need not mind my friends here; they are past taking any interest in our little comedy."

"You mean tragedy, I presume, Sir Robert. It looks more like that from my point of view."

"Ah, but you are prejudiced, my young unseen friend. Now, if you would kindly remove your finger from that trigger I would bundle my present companions into this other cabin, and you could come in, and we could discuss the matter."

"Not in the meantime, thank you," replied Tom, much taken by the wonderful coolness of the man whose

life hung on a thread so slight that the faintest tremble of Tom's hand would break it.

"But you are taking an unfair advantage over me," continued Sir Robert. "You know me, yet I have not the remotest idea who you are. Won't you introduce yourself? I know you are young, from the sound of your voice, but there my knowledge ends."

"And there is no reason why it should extend farther. You and your ship are in our hands, and will remain so until we have come to an understanding on certain matters."

"Quite so. May I ask what these matters are? You see, it is rather difficult for me to keep from moving in here; the ship is rolling considerably."

"I am sorry I cannot help that. I should advise you to hold on tight."

"Mister Tom. It is me—Kotay—don't shoot," cried a voice from behind Tom.

"All right, Kotay. Is everything ready now? Where are the others?"

"Here, laddie," cried Murray's voice, and the Scot issued from the darkness. "We've done the trick completely, and here is your father and Mr. Preston."

Two gentlemen appeared at Murray's side; but Tom cried out hastily, "Don't speak just now, father. I am watching the chief of the gang, and I daren't take my eyes off."

"I'll relieve you now, my boy," said Murray.

"I must really beg your pardon," interposed Sir Robert. "I can't help hearing your conversation, and——"

"Don't trouble yourself about that," replied Tom. "I heard all yours to-night."

"I was going to observe," resumed Sir Robert, "that if, as appears to me, a meeting of long-lost friends is about to take place, I shall feel greatly honoured if you will make free use of my private saloon for the purpose. You will find the entrance to it on the starboard side of this poop."

"We are much obliged," said Murray, peering through the port-hole at the man inside, "and we'll just tak' ye at your word."

Sir Robert started. "You are not the person with whom I have been conversing this last little while?" he said in surprise. "How many are there of you? Who are you, and how did you get on board? Have yon any connection with the Boys?"

Murray withdrew his head and substituted his revolver, and while Tom rushed to his father he remarked, "You are in too big a hurry, ma friend, but I'll enlighten you a wee bit. Some o' us were on board, and the others swam oot frae that reef, where I've just remembered we've another detachment waiting. I dinna ken what you mean by your last question, but I may tell you that it is a boy o' eighteen who engineered this game, an' it's to him you'll hae to reckon wi' for your sins presently." Murray took a keen delight in talking to his prisoner. He did not know him, of course, as Sir Robert had only recently been attached to the Pacific section.

While they conversed, Tom and Captain Grenville were experiencing their first moments of that exquisite joy which comes to dear friends on suddenly meeting after a lapse of long weary years, during which each had given up hope of ever seeing the other again. In this case there surely was reason for thankfulness;

and while Tom could hardly realise that he had actually found his father, Captain Grenville could just as little bring himself to think that the tall handsome youth whose hands were locked in his was his son—the boy of twelve, with no particular promise of anything, whom he had last seen in Worchester. After a few moments the Captain turned to the gentleman by his side and said, "Mr. Preston, this is my son Tom. How he got here I don't know; but you heard what Murray said."

Mr. Preston shook Tom's hand warmly. "I've heard a wonderful story about you, my boy," he said. "Murray has been singing your praises since he let us out of our prison. Are you by any chance one of the band of youths who have upset the plans of the Adventurers so much?"

"I don't know, sir," answered Tom, "but your son Richard and I with some comrades came here to look for you——"

"Richard! My son—is he here?"

"Not at the present moment. He was on board the *Cinderella;* we will get him to-morrow. But we have no time to talk now. Have you arms?"

"Yes, we have provided ourselves with a fair assortment. What is the plan? Can we defend ourselves on shore, or have you a vessel?"

"Sir, until I find my comrades I mean to hold this ship. Will you therefore assist us to place the gentleman inside in safe keeping, and then we are absolutely in command. My father can navigate her to our island, and we'll force her crew to work her. When we find the *Cinderella* we shall have our own fellows again.

Meanwhile I will go and arrange some method of getting Miss Preston on board."

"Ah, my daughter, where is she?" asked Mr. Preston eagerly.

"On the reef, sir. She came out with us, and we left her there to keep open a way of escape."

"But, Tom," put in Captain Grenville, "all this is like a scene from a fairy-tale. You seem to have acquired, in some mysterious manner, ships and men, and a marvellous amount of knowledge of the South Seas. Then you come on board a pirate ship from the sea in the middle of a storm as if that were the most natural thing in the world. How on earth did you do it?"

"Father, I will explain afterwards. There is not much of a crew on board this ship at present; they all went ashore to-day to seize our ship, the *Cinderella,* and my comrades. We shall find out from the man I have been guarding all night where they have gone and follow them, and when we get back our own fellows we can fight anything—I hear something. Hallo, Kotay, is it you? Where have you been?"

"I think we pretty well boss this ship now, so go ashore with flying monkey to bring pretty little girl back. She on rope now. Some one give me a hand to pull." Kotay began pulling at the end of a rope he held in his hand; he had evidently just come out of the sea, and Tom at once gathered that he had been ashore with a device on a pulley to be hauled over the rope Murray had fastened between the reef and the steamer, by which he meant to take Miss Preston on board. Willing hands lent their aid, and

soon Miss Flora was with them, tired and drenched with the spray; but her delight when she saw her father and the Captain was unbounded.

Here Murray turned to the men. "This gentleman inside says that he particularly desires to see the boy who is on board. He also adds that he will not make any attempt to escape or cause trouble, and says that if Mr. Preston or Captain Grenville is here he will perhaps say a good word for—oh, he's shouting for me." Murray turned to the occupant of the room again.

"My dear Scotch friend," remarked Sir Robert, "I heard you make a slight misstatement just now, which I should like if you would correct. I certainly do wish to see the person whom I first had the honour of, well—er—meeting to-night, but I do not wish any man to say a good word for me. That is quite impossible unless he lies. I merely wish you to repeat that if the young gentleman will honour me with an interview it will afford me much pleasure, and that having given my word that I will cause no trouble of any kind, perhaps either Captain Grenville or Mr. Preston will allow that I always keep my word."

"Man, I would almost guarantee you mysel'," answered Murray. "But—no, don't move or I'll blow you to blazes—I'll repeat your words."

"Yes, Sir Robert is a man of his word," said Captain Grenville, when Murray delivered his corrected message. "He is not at all a bad fellow, if he were not one of the chiefs of this gang."

"Well, father, you might help me to bundle the other men out, and then we can hold a council of war," said Tom, opening the door and entering the

little saloon. He was followed by his father and Mr. Preston. Murray still kept his weapon levelled through the port-hole, and Kotay was exploring among the other deck cabins to find a suitable place for Miss Preston.

"Ah, good evening, gentlemen," Sir Robert said as he saw his visitors. "I must beg you to excuse my not rising to receive you"—he nodded towards the revolver in Murray's hand and smiled. "I think if you would simply cart these people away and put them in the apartment which I believe you have just vacated, it would save you some trouble."

Captain Grenville laughed. "Yes, I think so," he said. "There is not much fear of them escaping from that prison, although I must admit that you made it as comfortable as possible for us."

"I am glad you found it so, sir. Now, if you would care to call matters square between us—apart, of course, from any grievance you may have against the Adventurers as a whole—you might ask your satellite to remove that little cannon from my sight; I shall never be able to look at a port-hole again without seeing a battery of artillery trained on my poor carcass."

"I am sorry, Sir Robert, but I have not the power to order its removal. This young man—my son—is in command."

"I am proud to meet you, my young friend," said Sir Robert. "I presume it was with you I had such an interesting conversation to-night concerning the various aspects of tragedy and comedy?"

"It was," answered Tom. "Mr. Murray, please remove your revolver now. I had the pleasure of hearing you discourse on a previous occasion, however, but I don't think you knew."

"Indeed! Ah, many thanks for ordering the removal of that gun. May I ask where and when that was?"

"Well, we haven't too much time to waste over unimportant matters like that just now," said Tom. "I have a proposition to make to you."

"But why detract from the pleasure of our interview by talking business? Won't you allow me to entertain you? There are a couple of Chinese cooks on board whom you could safely let up from below, and——"

"I fear we cannot think of that in the meantime. My business is one that cannot wait. That is why I took the extraordinary measure of calling on you tonight."

"I see." Sir Robert became lost in reflection.

Murray, Captain Grenville, Mr. Preston and Kotay, who had returned, had removed the three helpless men from the saloon and locked them in the cabin where the Captain and Mr. Preston had previously been confined. They then went round the ship and saw that everything was as secure as they could make it. This was a much simpler task than they had expected, for there did not appear to be more than a dozen men on board altogether, and the ship was so arranged that a few people on deck could readily control an unruly mob of men by simply locking them below, there being no means of gaining access to the deck other than by two cargo hatches and the fore and aft companion-ways. The two former were already closed, and could not be opened from below, while the presence of ponderous bolts and bars on the outside of the companion-way entrances seemed to indicate that the Adventurers

frequently found it convenient to keep unruly people below. The Adventurers themselves had their cabins on deck, but evidently the majority of them had taken part in the capture of the *Cinderella*.

Kotay was the first to return to Tom. He entered the room where his master and Sir Robert were conversing as freely as though they were the closest of friends, and signed to Tom that he wished to speak.

"What is it, Kotay?" asked Tom. "I cannot very well leave my friend, Sir Robert, by himself."

"You can if you wish," said that gentleman, "but it would be very foolish on your part. I could not promise to sit here alone and contemplate all the nice things you intend to do with me."

"I go hunt now for clothes for lady. She need something dry. No good for her to be wet so long."

"No, Kotay, you are quite right," said Tom. "We must do something for her——"

"Pardon me," interrupted Sir Robert. "I confess I am somewhat amazed to hear that there is a lady on board a—well, what you would perhaps term a pirate ship. I trust she has not suffered great inconvenience in paying us a visit, and hasten to place my cabin and wardrobe at her disposal. When on shore in civilised ports I sometimes dress to represent a lady—it pays very well in my profession, you know—and I think your lady friend will find all she requires in my collection. Perhaps afterwards I may be allowed to see her?"

"The lady is Mr. Preston's daughter, sir," said Tom rather sternly, as Kotay departed grinning. "A British girl will dare and suffer as much for those she cares for as any man."

"Mr. Preston's daughter!" cried Sir Robert. "How by all that is inexplicable did she get to this part of the world?"

"She has been here since your gang left her with her father, my father and Mr. Murray. I found her to-day, or rather yesterday, seeing it is now two in the morning, and Mr. Murray and she came with me to join her brother on our ship. It had been stolen, however, and we determined to take yours in return. It seems, however, this ship belongs to Mr. Preston too. We shall deal with your crew at daylight and go and look for the German cruiser which is somewhere about——"

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," interrupted Sir Robert, with a slightly changed voice. "I do not wish to say a word in my own behalf, but I had not the slightest idea that the Adventurers included the marooning of girls as part of their plans——"

"You are a bit too late with——"

"Hear me out, young man. I was going to add that seeing they have committed such an unwarranted act, and I am among those responsible for their conduct, I must now do all I can to rectify it."

"You can do nothing, Sir Robert."

"Don't talk nonsense. I have been simply playing with you all the time. I can end this comedy any moment by merely allowing my foot to press a certain spring under this table, which of course you do not see, and the floor with its occupants would sink to the next deck."

"And you would be dead before we reached it," said Tom warmly. "I have had you covered with a

revolver in my pocket; even at this moment a touch on the hair trigger would——"

"Stop all that. You propose looking for the German cruiser, and I say that that is folly on your part, because you cannot clear yourselves of suspicion, no matter what you do; while you may be certain that our virtuous friends at present on the *Cinderella* will perjure their souls to incriminate you too. Now, I propose that you sit tight where you are. The *Cinderella* will be back here in time, and before then we can surely come to a compromise of some kind. I do not mean that the Adventurers and you shall become friendly—that is impossible; but I mean that by facilitating your happy reunion with your friends, you may be disposed to regard me, personally, as one who would like to make amends for certain things. After that, of course, we'll fight the general matter out to the end."

"Then state briefly how you propose to make amends," said Tom.

"I have already told you that the *Cinderella* must come back before we can sail away."

"Which is an error on your part. This ship will sail at sunrise, unless you give me good reason why she shouldn't."

"I take it you are one of the boys who raised the *Cinderella?*"

"I am."

"Then, if you sail away with this ship, you will neglect the first opportunity of rescuing your comrades."

"How so?"

"Oh, I don't know. I thought that any of you boys could do wonders. They will be here; that should

be enough for you. I am not going to go back on those associated with me, however much I may dislike their methods of work; but I am ready to promise that for the first six hours after the *Cinderella* comes alongside, you will have a free hand to do anything and everything you can, without hindrance from any one on this ship. You will also have my best wishes for your success in whatever you decide to do; but in common fairness to my people I must attempt to take a hand in the game against you after that time has passed."

"But if we prevent you?"

"If you can, do so by all means. I am merely conceding so much because of my strange ideas of fair play."

"But you and your ship are in our hands now. We can keep you for six years if we like."

Sir Robert smiled. "You are not talking like one of the boys when you make statements like that," he said.

Tom thought for a moment.

"We have a pretty powerful gun in the bows," Sir Robert suggested. "If you can fire her——"

"Then I take you at your word," cried Tom. "You guarantee absolute neutrality of yourself and men for six hours after the *Cinderella* comes alongside, and also give us the complete command of this ship for that time?"

"That is what I have agreed; but allow me to suggest that you are not likely to terrorise the people on the *Cinderella* even although you threaten all sorts of things. Can you train and fire a gun?"

"Oh, I have no doubt some of us can do that."

"Very well, we understand each other. My boy, I hope you can invent some plan which will carry you through; but remember after the six hours are up, I reserve the right to take a hand in the game."

"That is all right."

"Then with your permission I will have a sleep now; I am tired. I would suggest your doing the same. The *Cinderella* will in all probability land all of your comrades she does not require for us to attend to. Good-night."

Sir Robert stretched himself on the couch, and Tom ran out to consult with the others.

The dark hours of morning dragged on slowly, and the storm abated somewhat, but to those who had forcibly taken charge of the vessel there could be no sleep.

At sunrise the *Cinderella* was sighted bearing down upon them.

"Oh, that I had another man!" cried Tom despairingly.

"Won't I do?" asked Miss Preston, who had arrayed herself in garments borrowed from Sir Robert's wardrobe, and looked charming despite the night she must have spent.

"By Jupiter! yes," cried Tom. "You can row yourself to the shore, and carry a note from me to your brother."

## CHAPTER XIII

# Thomson's Transformer Does Good Work

MEANWHILE the *Cinderella's* captors were getting a little more than they had bargained for, and were as far from achieving the results they had anticipated when they decided upon its seizure as ever. It was chance which put the opportunity of doing this in their way. Their ship the *Pacific Queen,* the old *Southern Cross* refitted and renamed, had been cruising near the New Mecklenbergs islands looking for the mysterious pearl island when their fresh-water tanks were found to be greatly in need of refilling. As it is a very difficult matter procuring good water on most South Sea islands, and they knew there was a plentiful supply on the island on which their depot was built, they straightway turned and sailed for it, and it was their smoke that Tom had seen from the hillside.

When they neared the reef the floating notice attracted their attention, and they at once realised that the island now contained inhabitants who were certainly not afraid. Captain Grenville and Mr. Preston were naturally as much surprised as any one, for they knew of no one on the isalnd but Miss Preston and Murray.

A council of war was at once held. "It has come to a strange climax if the Pacific Section of the Twentieth Century Adventurers are to be prevented

from landing on what they call their shore headquarters," laughed Herr Buelon. "That notice is very frank."

"And to the point," added Sir Robert. "'Filibusters will be sunk!'"

"It's those confounded boys!" exclaimed Slippery Charlie. "I dreamt about them last night."

"I am of the same opinion," said Bankstone. "No people but them would hang out a challenge to us like that."

"Then they are in our hands at last," cried Crosswood. "We can land a strong force and rush them."

"You forget the notice," said another of the party. "That spells 'hands off.'"

"Bosh. That is bluff. How could they sink us? I call it sheer impertinence on their part."

"We can at least get back our boat," remarked the Captain of the ship. "The *Cinderella* is worth something."

"Yes, if she is there," agreed Sir Robert. "And if she is, it follows of course that our young friends are very much there too. In which case I recommend that we land the strongest party possible in our boats and attack them by surprise. We can't do it any other way."

Herr Buelon agreed with Sir Robert. He was a very cautious although a fearless man, and since he had been made chief of the Pacific Section had, with Sir Robert, done his best to raise the work of the Adventurers to something above the paltry deeds to which the Pacific branch had of late degenerated. But there was absolutely no sentiment in the man. He was a human machine, and, unlike Sir Robert, his ideas of right and wrong were governed solely according

to his calculations as to ultimate profit and loss to his Society. He was, it was generally understood among the others, an exile from his native land, and although at war with all mankind he never showed a vindictive spirit unless when planning some action which would particularly hurt Germany. But he always counted the cost of everything with a wonderful preciseness, and thus often disagreed with the plans of his subordinates who were reckless irresponsible scoundrels. He would never allow interference with ships on the mail routes between Canada or the United States and Australia, nor with vessels regularly engaged in the Island trade. "We might make one good haul," he would say, "but it would be the breaking up of our organisation in these parts. The Australian squadron would be around investigating at once, and would co-operate with the German and American cruisers at Samoa until we were driven from the seas. So long as we only tackle vessels off the mail routes, or confine our operations to the sphere of influence of one country, no one but those immediately concerned will be interested, and if we use good judgment and take all precautions, that need trouble us little."

The *Cinderella* and its owners, therefore, were safe game for the Adventurers, even although the boys offered no other attraction and were not the straightout enemies of the gang, for well they knew she had sailed with very incomplete papers, on a mysterious mission, and no one was ever likely to inquire as to her fate. It was the pearl island the Adventurers chiefly desired, however; it would pay better than anything else, for pearl shell was increasing in price daily. Hence every man that could be spared from the ship

went ashore with Herr Buelon to endeavour to capture the *Cinderella,* the look-out in the crow's nest having reported that he could make out her masts from his perch, hidden among the trees. Thus it happened that as the boys lolled about the deck or slept that Sunday afternoon a score of men approached from all sides and noiselessly rushed the gangway, swarmed up the mooring ropes at bow and stern, and flung themselves wildly upon every person they saw.

Poor Ah Sing went down first. He had come on deck with a tray laden with cups of tea for the boys and the officers. His cry made Captain Inglis swing round, and he caught one of a couple of foreigners who had charged down upon him a blow on the chin which sent him reeling half-way back the deck. He took in the whole situation at once, and without the slightest hesitation closed with his other opponent, whom after a severe struggle he raised to the gunwale and dropped overboard. Then he rushed to the assistance of Jack, who was fighting bravely against a ferocious-looking German twice his size. But the Captain never reached Jack's side; a huge Irishman caught him in his arms and laid him flat on the deck, and despite his struggles bound him securely, although careful not to hurt him.

Richard was caught before he could get out of his deck-chair, and Stansbury had only time to close a man's eyes with a well-directed blow when his own received the same treatment, and he fell. Powell was in the stoke-hole at the time, and hearing the noise on deck was about to come up to see what was wrong when several men burst upon him. He played on their swarthy faces with a steam hose until a powerful Scot

gripped him in arms of steel with the words: "I dinna like the job, laddie, but I'm no' ma ain master."

Thomson perhaps had the best chance of all to distinguish himself. He was an extremely powerful youth and possessed muscles, trained in the fitting shop, like links of a chain. He had been talking to Aquinili down on the forward deck when he saw a couple of men vault on to the forecastle, having climbed up a mooring rope. Ah Sing's cry rang out at the same instant, and instinctively he knew what had happened, for in one of the men he recognised Slippery Charlie. Without a word he gripped an iron bar lying near and waited, and next second Slippery Charlie was stretched on the deck, felled with a blow he would have reason to remember until a sterner retribution should finally overtake him. Aquinili in like manner accounted for the other. The Kanakas had all been asleep and were easily attended to, as were also the two remaining firemen. But the spirit of his forefathers burned fiercely in Thomson. Already his comrades were helpless on their own steamer; he would make some one suffer for that. Dropping down the open hatchway he gained the lower deck and ran along to the engine-room. Just as he reached it the engines started to throb slowly, and he knew that the *Cinderella* was really captured and that his beloved engines were in other hands. The boy's heart was sore; he knew he could not fight the ship himself, and he had no desire to waste his strength against an ordinary member of the crew. He looked into the engine-room and then felt much better. The man who had stolen the chart, and whom Tom and he knew as Bankstone, was standing by the throttle valve; most of the others had gone into

the stoke-hole to assist in getting up steam quickly. Thomson gripped his iron stanchion and crept inside. Next moment Bankstone was lying senseless across the railing with a bruise on his head which, like Slippery Charlie, he would carry to his dying day.

Gliding quietly into a corner Thomson saw his comrades carried into the saloon and locked therein, and then his eyes fell on Herr Buelon and a smile of seraphic joy spread over his face. That gentleman held a revolver in each hand, but he never got a chance to use them. Thomson's blood-stained iron club again did its work, and as the Chief of the Adventurers fell, the half-frenzied yet almost diabolically cool-nerved boy again glided away. His knowledge of the ship stood him in good stead, and before night came on he had marked for life a good number of those who seemed to be in authority, and a panic had arisen on board. No one had seen this awful dealer of head-splitting blows, and each feared that he would be the next victim. In some cases the fears were justified, and many more might also have felt his vengeance had he not grown more desperate and lost his sense of coolly calculating his movements. An hour after dark he climbed the hatchway to attack the steersman, but the moment he stepped on deck a shot from a revolver struck him in the leg, and the brave boy was taken.

Some time afterwards Herr Buelon entered the saloon, his head bandaged all over. He must have been suffering intensely, but in a tone of voice as of one entering a club-room he said:

"Good evening, gentlemen. I have come to pay my respects as soon as I could."

"You are a cowardly pirate," said Richard.

"Perhaps you are right in a general sense, sir," returned the German, "but I must object to the adjective. I am not cowardly, or I might have a sound head on my shoulders at the present moment."

"Well," spoke Captain Inglis, "come to the point. What do you want? Remember I'll hold you answerable for anything that happens to these boys, and you will perhaps find it inconvenient to pay the reckoning."

Herr Buelon smiled. "Gentlemen of a profession such as mine," he said, "take all risks. I did not come here to indulge in small talk, however; I came to say that I am sorry you are in this plight, and that you can end it yourselves if you choose."

"Indeed," said Captain Inglis; "how?"

"You are in possession of some information which the people I represent desire. If you supply me with that information and give your word not to talk of anything that has happened, you will be landed at any port in the Pacific you like to name as soon as steam-power can take you there."

"I thank you on behalf of my comrades and myself," said Richard, "but we will certainly not agree to the latter part of your proposal. Captain Inglis and this officer, however, should not be dragged into our quarrel, and I do not speak for them."

"Bet you all the pearl shell on the island you do," cried the Captain. "Do you think we would tell the skunks where the island is just to get safely to an Australian port. No, sir, we won't."

"I have an alternative proposal to offer," said Herr Buelon. "If you will not give your word that you will not speak of this affair, but will give me the desired

information nevertheless, I will undertake to land you wherever you choose in the Pacific—of course within one year from date. By that time we shall have done all we wish to do——"

"And what do we know that interests you so much?" inquired Richard.

"The position of a certain island."

"And if we don't give you that?" inquired Inglis.

"Then I shall be compelled to deposit you on the island we have just left, without your ship of course. We shall require her for other purposes."

"Do you mind telling us how far we are from that island now?" continued Inglis.

"Twenty-five miles west almost exactly." answered Herr Buelon. "Why do you ask?"

Inglis laughed. "I don't know," he said; "I suppose it is that blamed curiosity of mine. But you may set a course back as soon as you like; you're as near the pearl island as you'll ever be from our telling." This statement, considering the fact that it was only nine feet from them in a vertical direction at that moment, was fairly accurate.

"Perhaps you will reconsider your decision before to-morrow," said Herr Buelon evasively; "not that I wish to threaten you, but—these islands are not pleasant places on which to spend one's lifetime. You will excuse me now, I trust; my head is troubling me. To which of you young gentlemen am I indebted for the blow which dropped me?"

"I knocked you over," said Thomson; "and I warn you that you'll have reason to remember the next blow I give you."

"My dear sir, I will not readily forget this one. I

would also like to request you to let me know before you strike, should fate ever allow you an opportunity of giving me a second blow. I promise you I will pay you heavily to consider the deed done, and will act myself strictly as if it had been fully carried out." Herr Buelon spoke wearily, and raised his hand to his head as if suffering great pain. "I am very sorry you are inconvenienced," he continued, addressing Thomson. "We are not murderers, however bad we may be, and I had forbidden the use of firearms during this venture. The man who shot you is suffering for his disobedience now. I trust you were not much hurt?" The man spoke like a kindly soft-hearted old gentleman, but there was a hard ring in his voice when he spoke of disobedience that showed he had two sides to his character.

"It was only a flesh wound," said Jack. "I dug the bullet out with my knife. It takes more than a bullet to worry Thomson."

"Ah yes, you are all young and strong. Well, good-night, gentlemen, I—I——" His face turned ghastly white and he staggered to a chair, his sentence remaining incompleted.

"The man is very ill," cried Jack, who had some knowledge of medical science, springing forward to Herr Buelon's side; "this stuffy atmosphere has upset him. Open all the ports and doors and let him have air."

"No, don't open the door," muttered the German. "I must not let the men see that I am not myself or it would be the worse for you. I'll be all right in a minute."

"No, you won't," cried Captain Inglis, also coming forward while Powell and Richard opened all the ports.

"Why, man, your head is split open, the wound is gaping almost half an inch wide." Jack had removed the bandages, and the effect of Thomson's blow was now apparent.

"It is raining outside," said Richard. "The rainy season must have started."

"Yes," answered Inglis, "that is why it is so stuffy inside. But this man is half-dead——"

"I'll doctor him," said Jack. "Luckily our medicine chest was put in this saloon last week."

"Thank you, boy," muttered Herr Buelon. "Don't trouble too much about me."

But Jack was already washing the wound, and then with deft fingers he pulled it together with some silver wire stitches. "You should really carry a doctor on board when you go raiding," he said, as he bound up the head again; "you would probably have become seriously ill had your head not received attention."

Herr Buelon was now much better. "I shall remember your kindness, gentlemen," he said, rising. "Believe me, this life is not one of my choosing—but never mind, I am not going to preach. I will do all I can to help you, boys, I——"

"Why not give up this life?" cried Richard. "You are not a common cut-throat. Come away——"

"No use talking, my boy. I have cast in my lot with these people, and among them I will stay to the end. I have a past, and in the excitement of this sort of life I forget it. Good-night." He opened the door and walked out, and they heard the sound of locks being turned which showed that there was a guard outside. The vessel was now tossing and rolling as she had not done since the boys had known her.

"It's the beginning of the rainy season," said the Captain. "It always starts with a storm. I wonder what Mr. Grenville is doing just now, and what he will think of our being captured so easily?"

"If Tom has not been caught by some of them," said Thomson, "we'll know soon. He'll take steps of some kind, and I shouldn't wonder if he captures the other ship and comes after us."

"He'll hardly do that," said Inglis; "but it has just occurred to me that we might by some strategy get back our own ship. Thomson has knocked out a good number of our opponents, it appears, and their leader will not take much interest in matters for the next little while."

"What do you propose, then, Captain?" asked Richard.

"That we get out of this saloon somehow and lie in wait throughout the ship until we get a chance of tackling one of them where he cannot get help. With some luck we might man them down until we were stronger than them."

"They would simply shoot us," said Richard. "You must remember that we are dealing with men who would not hesitate at committing any crime. They are desperate, for they know the only fate in store for them should they fail in any venture they try after having gone so far as they have in this case."

"I'll tell you," cried Jack. "We can blow up the forward oil-tanks—we have the switchboard here in the saloon with us—and Thomson's transformer which is also here, if connected with the main leads from the dynamos and switched on to the feeding wires of the floating magnetic regulating valves, would burn the

entire apparatus at once, and if the high voltage which would then spark across the oil—a hydrocarbon, you know—did not immediately explode it and thus shut off the supply from the boilers, it would generate such a volume of hydrogen gas that would either explode or lift the deck. In any case we would bring the ship to a stop and force them to compromise with us before we allowed it to proceed, for the magnetic regulators are in every tank, and they would never dream of the way we had caused the accident."

"That is all very fine," said Powell, "but it is our own ship you are proposing to damage, and we can't afford to lose a tank of oil; we are running very short already."

"Then suggest something else."

"Well, I was wondering how we could take advantage of having the switchboard in our control, and when you mentioned the transformer the idea struck me that we might work off a dodge that would help us."

"Out with it, then," cried Inglis, and Thomson sat up also to hear his comrade's plan.

"The propeller shaft passes underneath this saloon, and I see an auger over by that specimen case Thomson was making on Saturday."

"Well, go ahead," said Thomson; "there is a piece of copper wire in the bottom locker."

"Then you know the plan, David?" cried Powell. "How will it work?"

"I don't quite see the whole thing yet," answered Thomson. "Hurry up with the idea."

"We'll bore a hole in the floor above the shaft and drop a wire through so that one of its bared ends will rub against the revolving shaft. Then we'll include

the transformer in the engine-room lamp circuit and switch its intensified current or secondary wires on in place of the primary or ordinary ones. The enormously high voltage will, of course, burst the lamps, and whenever we see by the interruption in the flow that such is the case, we'll disconnect again and fasten one of its wires to the one touching the shaft. Incidentally one may also short-circuit the twin wires of the lamp and make them act as one——"

"What are you driving at?" asked Stansbury. "I don't know much about electricity, but——"

"I see it," cried Jack excitedly. "The shaft will now be the positive wire, and the wires leading to the lamps the negative. The shaft connects with the engines and all the metal work of the engine-room——"

"But allowing all that," said Richard; "can the intensified current jump across the engine to the lamps?"

"No," answered Powell; "but when the lamps burst the engineer in charge will at once replace them, and that very act will then include them in the intensified circuit, for whenever they push a lamp into its socket they will have become lightning conductors themselves, and I don't think they'll like it."

"Good," ejaculated Thomson, reaching for the brace and bits. "Let's begin."

"But if there should be anyone in the engine-room with his senses about him he will stop the dynamos and thus set free the others who may be caught," suggested Richard.

"That we must chance," said Powell. "At any rate, some one will eventually come here to investigate, and we can be ready to rush out when they open the

door. Once we obtain command of the engine-room and get the number of our captors reduced, we can invent some other plan to complete the business."

Thomson had a hole bored in the floor before he had finished talking, and immediately afterwards a cable of copper wire was rubbing against the revolving shaft. The crudely but ingeniously constructed transformer was then hurriedly connected—Thomson had been improving it on Saturday evening, hence its presence in the saloon—and all looked on breathlessly as Powell deftly manipulated the wires leading to the engine-room lamps. Of course there was also a switch by which the lights could be cut off at the control of the engineer in his own domain, but Powell did not intend that they should have a chance to use it.

The system of wires was connected, and then Powell proposed to start the transformer. "Pull out these ordinary wires when you hear the thing buzzing," he said to Jack, and his comrade ranged himself alongside the switchboard with business-like intent. Next instant there was a low vibrating sound not unlike that emitted by a swarm of bees. Jack pulled out the old wires, a series of vivid sparks and a flash of lightning played over the contacts on the switchboard, there was a smell as of something burning, then several loud reports in the direction of the engine-room. The intensified current had flashed along the wires and already had done the first part of its work.

"They're all burst," cried Jack in great delight. "I hear the men swearing."

Powell stopped the transformer, and Thomson disconnected the wires. In almost no time the wire touching the shaft was joined on, and the lamp wires

connected both together to the other circuit. Then Powell restarted the transformer, and Captain Inglis, Stansbury, and Richard looked on in mute wonder and admiration.

"Listen now, boys," said Powell. "We'll hear what has happened directly."

He was not mistaken. "Here, Frenchy," they heard some one say with an oath, "lend a hand. The blamed lamps have gone out all at once, an' it's as dark as the infernal regions here."

"Ze lamps hav' burst. Ze dynamos will hav' be racing," answered another voice. "They must be ze same old lamps as vas in ze ship ven we sunk her in Sydney. I vill come and help. New lamps I saw in that press behind ze dynamo."

A mumbling conversation followed which the prisoners could not overhear, then suddenly a series of yells burst out, which could be heard from end to end of the ship.

"We've got them," cried Powell in delight. "Just listen to them."

"Young man," said Inglis reprovingly, but with a twinkle in his eyes which spoiled the effect. "You should not listen to them; the language they are using is not fit for boys to hear."

A great commotion now arose throughout the vessel, and men could be heard running about the deck overhead and shouting in strange languages.

"By Jupiter! boys," laughed Captain Inglis. "This ship is manned by the scum of all nations. I hear German, French, Italian, and half a dozen other tongues I don't know, among that mob upstairs."

"Some one is coming here," interjected Stansbury. "Get ready."

Next moment the locks were turned and three men rushed into the saloon.

"What have you done, you confounded wizards," cried one. "You'll get your throats cut for this."

"Oh, shut up," interrupted Inglis, tripping the speaker. "You're only fit to make a noise."

Richard and Stansbury tackled the other two, and Thomson and Jack throwing themselves on the men from behind quickly decided the matter.

"Come now, boys," cried the Captain. "There can't be many more available men on the craft."

Locking their victims in the saloon the party ran along the lower deck and through the bulkhead door into the engine-room. Thomson seemed to have forgotten that he was wounded.

"Be careful," he cried, striking a light. "We'll get electrocuted if we touch any of the lamps."

Two men cowered in a corner; they were shaking with fear, but when they knew they were seen began to use very bad language. They were almost paralysed, and offered no resistance when coils of wire were thrown round them. "If you move," said Stansbury, "you'll be burnt to a cinder, and I hope you won't believe me, for I would like you to commit suicide."

"We will not move—we will not move," shrieked the French engineer.

"No, you can bet your boots on that," growled the other. "We're not taking on any Ajax business."

"No," laughed Stansbury. "You are poor but honest pirates only, and defying lightning is not in your line."

Jack and Richard closed down the iron door leading to the stoke-hole; the Captain and Powell searched for more victims; Thomsom promptly stopped the engines,

and the *Cinderella* rolled on the great Pacific swell. The boys wished to go on deck and attack every one there at once, but the Captain advised against the idea. "There must still be about a dozen men somewhere," he reasoned, "and we would only lay ourselves open to an attack we could not resist. Let us wait here in the darkness where they will be afraid to come until daylight. We have the run of the ship down here, and after turning out whoever—if any one—is in our cabins, we can arm ourselves and force them to make terms."

But just then the deck entrance to the engine-room was closed with a clang, and the party realised that those on deck were afraid of them and had taken measures to keep them below.

"Ha, ha," laughed Stansbury. "By Jove, we'll terrorise them out of their skins—oh, I say, could you throw that lightning of yours into a telephone?" He had lit a candle and was now pausing in front of a telephone attachment Thomson had erected between the engine-room and the bridge.

"Yes, I think so," said Powell. "Why?"

"Because here is the telephone; suppose we rang up whoever is on the bridge, and when we got him, turned on the lightning same as you did before. We could then let him have some facts."

"Capital!" exclaimed Thomson. "Of course we can." He hitched a wire to the rail round the engines and fastened the other end round an iron beam overhead.

"That beam has metallic connection with another bar of channel-iron forward, upon which the bridge deck is chiefly supported and into which the rails around it are fixed."

No one asked him to explain; all knew that Thomson never made a mistake in matters pertaining to electricity or engineering. Meanwhile Powell had gingerly hitched a flexible wire round one of the lamp sockets and stood beside Thomson with the other end grasped in a piece of rubber.

"Best let me do the talking," said Stansbury. "I am the only man who has an imagination, or, in other words, I am the only liar in the party, and one is needed this time."

"All right," agreed Thomson; you may do any talking you like. I'll talk through the transformer when you get any one at the other end."

The dynamo was still working; it was driven by an independent engine, and already Jack had mounted a light direct from its terminals.

"I only hope," he said to Richard, "that those fellows we locked in the saloon won't know enough to switch off the transformer. It is all intensified current we are working with now."

"If they do," answered Richard, "I suppose some of you will invent something to take its place." He had unbounded faith in the abilities of his parners, and was fast assuming the characteristic coolness of Tom, although he could not calculate cause and effect in any way like the absent partner.

Stansbury rang up the bridge on the telephone, and after a minute or two was answered by one who from his voice appeared to be a Dutchman.

"I want the commander of the ship," spoke Stansbury, and Powell stood ready with his deadly wire. He had sparked it across the overhead beam to see that the current was still there, and now only awaited the signal

from the speaker to attach it to the telephone. That in itself would be harmless, however, but well he knew that to preserve his equilibrium while talking the person on the bridge would have to grasp the live rail around it and then the circuit would complete itself through his ear.

"Dat vas me," answered the man at the other end of the telephone. "Just say who you are."

"We're the underground commanders," said Stansbury, "and we wish to draw your attention to the fact that within five minutes you and your gang will be in a warmer place than the South Seas. Do you savvy? We are just about to fire the magazine——"

"Yah! Dat was no goot to tell me. You haf no magazine."

"All right, Dutchy. How do you like this?" He signed to Powell as the ship lurched heavily, and Powell did his duty. The confused jangle of sounds that came through the telephone, and the roars and shrieks which could be heard from the deck above the storm, told that again the boys had scored.

"Leave him alone now," said Thomson. "He can't let go. He is gripping the rail with one hand and completes the circuit through his ear."

It was plainly evident that the deck was now a scene of great commotion. The party below could hear the heavy footsteps of men running along the deck, and the howls, curses and entreaties of their victim to pull him off. But the men were all afraid to go near him. Already they were regretting that they had ever run against the boys, and their nerves were overstrung. It was three in the morning now, but it seemed as if daylight would never come. Verily the crew had got all

they wanted of the prisoners, and most of the Adventurers themselves were tossing feverishly wherever they could find a place to lie down, Thomson's blow being the cause in most cases.

"I say, gentlemen," suddenly spoke the captured engineer, "I can't keep from moving any longer. I am cramped; I must sit down."

"Very well, you may do that," said Stansbury.

"And as I never signed on to fight miracle workers," continued the engineer, "blow me if I don't chuck the game and plunk in with you."

"And me too," cried the other.

"Thanks, but that would be robbing the hangman. We can fight the ship without you."

At this point the door above opened and a voice called down: "I would like to make an arrangement with you gentlemen."

"Fire away, then," the Captain replied. "Who are you?"

"Herr Buelon. I find it is impossible to control my men. They are fools and afraid. But I can't speak loud enough for you to hear, the sound splits my head. Will your leader come up, or shall I come down?"

"Come down," cried Richard. "We know you are a gentleman at any rate."

"But be careful or you will go off in a flash of lightning," added Stansbury. "We are wizards here."

"I know something of electrical science myself," said Herr Buelon, coming down. "My University studies tended in that direction." He reached the engine-room platform. "I have come to say that I am compelled to give you up as being beyond my power in the meantime," he said. "What compromise will you agree to?"

"That you instantly return to the island we left and leave us there with our ship intact," said Richard; "and that Captain Inglis takes command of the ship now."

"Are you not asking for more than your present position warrants?" suggested Herr Buelon. "I don't think we are in such a state that we need accept that proposal."

"Then get aloft as quickly as you like," said Stansbury. "We are going to explode the magazine."

"But I did not know——"

"We can't help your ignorance. We may as well have the satisfaction of sending you to your proper home as decide to allow ourselves to be cast away on an island."

"Um—how did you manage to entrap that gentleman who is making all the noise on the bridge just now?"

"Oh, easily enough," laughed Stansbury. "We can even sail the ship back against your will from here. We can control the steering-gear by magnates, and at any moment we can electrocute every one on deck because it is inoculated—insulated, I mean—and we've already made all the connections."

"I don't quite understand it," mused the German.

"Nor are you likely to," said Stansbury.

"I did not know you were the chief of the Syndicate," said Herr Buelon coldly. "Why are you the only talker?"

"I'll talk too if you like," said Inglis. "I am not as great a talker maybe as Stansbury, but I'll undertake to say that there won't be a living pirate on board this craft after the next twelve hours."

"Dear me! Gentlemen, I consent to your proposal," Herr Buelon interrupted. "But, mark you, I make no promise about what we shall do after we leave you and your ship on the island."

"In that case neither shall we," said Richard. "We may call upon you to pay a very heavy reckoning indeed, and I for one will never cease doing my utmost against you until I get my father and sister and Captain Grenville out of your hands."

"We are all with you there, boy," said Captain Inglis. "We'll fight the skunks at every turn."

"You mention names that are familiar to me, sir," the German remarked. "I think the gentlemen you name are on our ship, the *Pacific Queen*. However, we understand each other. You are to be put back on the island as you were, and then war, so to speak, is declared. Am I right?"

"Perfectly," said Richard. "We are not afraid of you."

"Then I shall go and inform the executive as to the terms I have made. Believe me, however, you would be better to remain below as much as possible. Some of our people do not understand the meaning of honour."

"No," assented Inglis. "It is hardly in keeping with their profession."

"Perhaps not," said Herr Buelon coldly. "But I am not here in defence of their character, nor of my own. It is, I fear, almost entirely to the state of my head that you owe this compromise, and I advise you not to take us too cheaply next time we meet. By the way, you might kindly release the howling person on the bridge. His cries irritate me."

"Pull his hand off the rail and he'll be free," said

Thomson. "The telephone is all right if you don't hold on."

Herr Buelon smiled. "You certainly are remarkable young men," he said. "I wish you good-morning."

Thus it came about that a few hours later, as the rays of the rising sun struggled through the steaming haze which floated over the ocean, the *Cinderella* once more approached the gap in the island reef. The boys had remained below; Thomson had prowled about the engine-room, almost driving the two engineers who had lately been their prisoners frantic with his sarcastic criticisms on their methods. Silent and sullen were the Adventurers; they had been foiled, and the thought was not pleasing. Herr Buelon had retired to rest, having accepted the offer of Richard's cabin as gratefully as if he had been receiving a Royal favour.

"I say, Powell," whispered Thomson abruptly, as they approached the gap. "I don't like things altogether."

"Nor I," answered his comrade. "What is your idea?"

"You know the coil of cotton-covered wire in the empty cabin?"

"Yes."

"Well, I fancy it might be a good idea for you to wind it around your body under your clothes."

"You think we might not be landed as was arranged?"

"I am thinking that that coil of wire will just about reach from the beach to the ends of the wires I laid for firing the gun."

Powell whistled. "I understand," he said. "I'll do it now." He walked away, and Thomson continued to

annoy the engineers, and incidentally to work casually at a vice as if to pass the time.

The *Cinderella* hoisted some code signals to the *Pacific Queen* which were not answered, and passed inside the reef. The rain had stopped; it would come on again at sundown.

## CHAPTER XIV

# The Gun is Fired

SLOWLY the little craft battled across the now turbulent waters of the lagoon. The long rolling swell outside was here a broken mass of shoreward rushing breakers, although why the reef did not shelter the lagoon completely was not quite clear to the boys. At length the entrance to the inlet was gained and the *Cinderella* sailed smoothly in placid waters, and just then a strong odoriferous whiff of decomposing oysters assailed the nostrils of all on board.

The Captain and Richard, in answer to a summons, had gone on the bridge to take over the ship formally. Stansbury and Jack had gone forward to pick out their own crew, and Thomson and Powell were still in the engine-room. Suddenly the telegraph bell rang out 'stop,' then 'full speed astern,' then 'stop' again, and the two down below looking through the port-holes saw that they were alongside their old moorings. At the same moment they were called on deck, and on passing through the doorway were seized and bound tightly before they knew exactly what was happening.

"You needn't try any dodges this time, my scientific friends," some one said, and Thomson at once recognised Bankstone by the voice. "I am in charge now." He moved in front of them, and his bandaged head put the question of his identity beyond doubt.

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" demanded Thomson. "Where are our friends? We made an arrangement with Herr Buelon——"

"Which doesn't count now," replied Bankstone. Herr Buelon is unconscious, and as next in command here I have taken the responsibility of making an alteration in the arrangement."

"But we have not agreed to any alteration——"

"No, but you can't help yourselves. As a matter of fact we brought you and your ship back here as Herr Buelon promised; we always intended to do that. Our only object in sailing away with you was to try to obtain the knowledge of the position of the pearl island. After that we meant to leave you here in any case. Now, however, I see by those pearling tables that not only is the island near here, but that you are working it, and even at the risk of trouble with Herr Buelon afterwards —his notions of what he calls honour are out of place among our crowd anyway—I am going to take all that shell on board and try again to find the island."

"You are a contemptible liar and sneak," broke out Powell, "and we'll pay you for this."

"Don't make me angry or I'll order you to be lashed," spoke Bankstone; "and I'll take good care you won't get any chance to work off any more scientific tricks. It is you two who are responsible for that game, and I propose to leave you here until your comrades have shown us the island. How do you like that?"

"You are just what Powell says you are," retorted Thomson, "and a big mean sulking coward as well. You would talk of ordering us to be lashed! Why, you uneducated, uncivilised pig, I would lash *you* if we were where there were some Englishmen to see fair play."

"You wretched kid! I'll murder you——"

"No, you won't," interrupted some one. "I am an Englishman myself, and if you feel aggrieved you'll have to give the kid equal chances man to man."

"Hear, hear," cried several others. "Bankstone is not playing the game."

"Und him dot say he will abuse de boys is a liar," announced Thomson's late victim, the skipper. "I vas not English nor von half of us here, but I mineself vill guarantee that although we is not, we is gentlemen."

"Hear, hear," again chorused the men, and the boys laughed outright. There was something funny in the idea that the mongrel crowd aspired to the title of gentlemen.

"Oh well, have it as you like," said Bankstone; "the beggar gave me insolence, but I'll have my revenge later. Get ashore now, all hands, and bring that shell on board."

The men dispersed, and the two boys were flung down in a corner. Two hours later, with the enforced assistance of the *Cinderella's* own crew, including the philosophical Ah Sing, about fifty tons of pearl shell were stowed away in the holds, and a few pearls taken from the tables; then the *Cinderella* prepared to depart, and half an hour later still Thomson and Powell were put on shore on the edge of the lagoon.

"Good-bye, boys," cried Slippery Charlie, as the dinghy sailed back to the ship after landing them. "You were too clever by a long way for yourselves. I don't think your friends will give us the same trouble."

"Oh yes, they will," answered Thomson; "but say, I am wounded, as you know. You are a Briton; you

might give us half a chance by cutting these ropes that are binding us; you surely don't fear us now?"

"Between ourselves, boys," said the slippery one, coming back out of the boat, "I fear you at all times, but, as you say, I am a Briton, even although the old country has never evinced any joy over the fact, and hang it all, I'll give you your freedom anyhow, although I owe this head of mine to you." He cut the bonds that bound the two boys and the dinghy pushed off.

Thomson's face glowed with suppressed excitement. "Oh, Powell," he cried, "if we only had another man! Wherever is Tom? Unwind yourself of that wire as fast as you can."

The two boys ran into the shelter of the steaming vegetation so as not to be observed, and then there stepped in front of them a young fashionably-dressed English girl. The boys halted. Their astonishment was unbounded. What was she doing here? Her face was not black, she was not a native, then who was she? Powell gave it up and looked to his comrade for an answer to his unexpressed inquiries. But the lady herself solved the problem.

"I have a letter to my brother," she said, "but I do not see him here."

"Your brother?" exclaimed Thomson. "Then you are Miss Preston?"

"That is my name," she responded. "But where is Richard? Tom wants him urgently."

"Tom? Where is he?" cried Powell. "Your brother is on board the *Cinderella*."

"Give me the letter, please," said Thomson. "Your brother, Tom, and Powell here and I are all comrades. We haven't time to express our joy at meeting you, or

of asking or answering questions just now. We have got to stop that ship."

She handed him the note without a word, and he read aloud: "We have captured this ship. Come out at once and help us to man her. If you have a chance train the gun on the *Pacific Queen* and we shall then recapture the *Cinderella.*"

"Great Powers!" ejaculated Thomson. "Who are 'we' who are with Tom? How did you get here?" As he spoke he was frantically producing pieces of zinc, copper, and rubber from various hidden places about his garments, and Powell was spinning round like a dervish in a dance.

"I came from that ship over there in a boat. My father, Captain Grenville, Mr. Murray and a nice little Japanese are with Tom, and they've got all the pirates except Sir Robert bottled up somewhere. But there is no time for talk; what can I do to help just now?"

"Can you run? Do you know anything about connecting wires? Do you know where our opening tables are?—Oh, why are you a girl?" Thomson poured out his words impetuously, and without much regard to their intelligibility. He continued to produce nails and wire from his dress as he spoke, and Powell ceased not in his gyrations.

"Of course I can run," said the young lady. "And I have seen your pearl-opening tables several times. I can smell them now."

"There are two wires fastened at the end farthest from here. Do you think you could find them?"

"Yes, yes, I saw them," answered the girl, catching some of Thomson's excitement. "Tom showed them

to us when we passed that way. They are for firing the gun."

"Then here," said Thomson, seizing the terminals of the light cable Powell was unwinding from underneath his coat, and scraping the ends bare with his knife. "This is a cable carrying two wires—see, I am laying them bare now. Your brother's safety as well as a lot of other things depends on the bare ends of these wires being connected tightly with the corresponding ends of the other wires before that ship there reaches the gap outside. I am wounded and can't go, and Powell is needed here. Can you do it?"

The girl seized the end of the wire and was off with a bound.

"Just twist each of your wires round one of the others," cried Thomson, "and be sure the two lines don't touch where the copper is bared."

"I know," she called back. "Mr. Murray has taught me something about electricity." She disappeared round the shore of the inlet, and the wire paid out from Powell's feet faster than he could unwind himself.

"Lie down!" cried his comrade. "You'll get it off quicker by rolling on the ground, and not get dizzy either."

His companion discarded his upper garments, and throwing himself on the ground revolved like the barrel of a windlass.

Thomson had now unloaded himself. He had forgotten all about his wound. The *Cinderella* had hoisted her dinghy on board and had commenced to move into the lagoon. Catching up a piece of wood, a sheet of

copper foil, and a plate of zinc, he rushed down to the water's edge. "Bring your ends down here when you have reached them," he cried to Powell, and began working feverishly with the copper foil. He was making a galvanic battery to fire the gun, and the electrolyte was to be the salt water of the ocean.

Bending the copper foil until it was almost but not quite doubled, he threw it down and took up his sheet of zinc. On the top of it he bound with thread two strips of rubber, and then clamped the whole inside the double sheet of copper with more thread. Then he strapped the completed arrangement to the piece of wood and placed it in the water. It floated, but the copper-zinc attachment was immersed.

Powell had now released himself of the cable and ran with the end to his comrade, stripping its two wires bare as he did so. Meanwhile the coils paid out quickly, showing that so far Miss Preston was making good headway.

But the *Cinderella* was half-way across the lagoon. Would she be in time? The gun was trained on the middle of the gap. Thomson's idea was to wait until her stern was just there, and then to send minute electric sparks generated by the action of the salt water on his zinc-copper battery along the slender wires to the gun far up the mountain. For the rest he trusted to Providence.

"Perhaps the cable is not long enough," he cried desperately. "Carry the slack along, Powell." Seizing his quickly-constructed floating generator he limped up the inlet shores until the gap was just on the point of being hidden. Still the wire paid out. "Oh, Powell!

Will she be in time?" groaned Thompson. "Will she find the terminals and connect them properly?"

"I think so," answered Powell, who had grasped his comrade's idea from the first. "See, the wire is not running out now. She'll be there and joining them up."

"If she hasn't fallen into a hole or tripped somewhere," wailed Thomson. "I daren't try before the *Cinderella* is just there or the shot will be useless. She is almost at the reef now. Watch, Powell, and sing out when her stern is in line with the middle of the reef."

Powell took up his position, and Thomson, fastening one wire to the zinc plate, refloated the whole and bent over with the other wire in his hand awaiting the signal to touch the copper with it, and thus, if Miss Preston had succeeded in making the connections, send the magic flash along that would fire the gun. What the result would be Thomson did not know, but he thought dimly that if the shot sank the *Cinderella* by being a fraction of a second miscalculated, his comrades would save themselves somehow, and in any case the *Pacific Queen* was in Tom's hands and could lend assistance. He never for a moment doubted the successful working of the feeble battery. He knew it would generate for a brief second, when called upon, just sufficient electricity to travel the long distance and do all that was required.

But while Thomson was preparing to play an almost theatrical "lone hand" in the strange game, other players were also ready to take a part. The *Cinderella* detachment of course could not do much, although Captain Inglis had succeeded in freeing himself, which fact he signified by promptly pitching the Dutch skipper into

the scuppers. As a matter of fact he was in command of the bridge as the ship approached the gap, and was calculating whether he should run her on the reef or ram the *Pacific Queen.* Jack had likewise broken his bonds and was cutting out Stansbury to assist him in some plan he was maturing.

It was on the *Pacific Queen* that the chief factors of resistance to the *Cinderella's* free passage lay. Captain Grenville was lying behind the quick-firer ready to sweep the deck of everything alive when the *Cinderella* passed. Murray had gained access to the engine-room, and with Kotay's assistance in the stoke-hole was ready to drive the *Pacific Queen* in pursuit should the other vessel suspect anything and try to run away. Mr. Preston patrolled the decks looking for any signs of prisoners escaping, and Tom was everywhere at once, although Sir Robert's binoculars were seldom from his eyes, one moment scanning the oncoming *Cinderella,* and the next sweeping the shore for his comrades.

Sir Robert had thrown himself into a deck-chair, and was smoking a fragrant cigar as if neither care nor worry were within thousands of miles of him. On came the *Cinderella,* its officers, crew, and enforced passengers alike unconscious of what was in store. Already Captain Grenville had tried the mechanism of the quick-firer, and a grim smile of anticipation was on his face. He would have a chance at last of getting even with the wreckers, and he did not then care much what happened after that. Tom looking through his powerful glasses recognized with a start that Captain Inglis was on the bridge, but even as he looked he saw several men throw themselves upon him and haul him from the wheel. In consequence the vessel swung round

slightly and drifted broadside on towards the gap. She was quickly caught up, however, by one of the men, but her momentum had been checked, and she was in the middle of the gap before her stern came into line with the reef. At that moment a blinding flash leaped out from the mountain side, and next second a report not unlike the crack of a mighty whip reverberated through the air. A loud hissing noise accompanied the report, which increased in intensity until it seemed to shriek. This sound culminated in a crash, a rattle of chains, and the shouts of men. The *Cinderella's* rudder had been shot away, her steering-gear had sprung with the attendant jar, and the steering chains were broken. She drifted through the gap and swung round helpless, her momentum only saving her from being dashed back upon the reef by the mighty rollers.

Captain Grenville stared at the helpless craft for a moment and then up the hillsides. He did not leave his post, however, and prepared to exact his toll when she drifted into a more favourable position for him. Tom smiled; he saw that the damage could be repaired and that the game was now in his hands.

Sir Robert took his cigar from his mouth and stood up. "Dear me!" he remarked. "Most astonishing! The notice was true after all. Things look bad for the Adventurers."

"They do," said Tom, overhearing his words. "I don't think we'll require your six hours' neutrality now. But, by Jupiter, Richard or Thomson must have flown up that hill! It is only a quarter of an hour since I saw the dinghy putting them ashore."

"Er—may I ask what you propose doing next?" inquired Sir Robert, languidly replacing his cigar.

"I am going to summon your pirate gang to surrender unconditionally."

"And if they refuse?"

Tom shrugged his shoulders significantly, and pointed up the mountain.

"Who fired that gun?"

"That is a point, Sir Robert, that I prefer to keep secret."

"Oh! Well, it was a splendid shot. Since when has there been a gun mounted up there?"

"Since you were here last. And in order to let you understand one or two things I may tell you it is your own gun. We took it from your depot on shore along with one or two other trifles. But I require your aid just now."

"Indeed! In what way can I assist you?"

"The *Cinderella* will be on the reef shortly unless taken in hand. At a signal from me a storm of shot will rain upon her deck from your own quick-firer."

"Yes?"

"I wish you to tell your people that, and also to say that I desire all our men to be sent on board this ship."

"I understand. Then you will transfer those here to that ship, and either sink her or further disable her?"

"No, we are not Pacific policemen. We want our own ship. Will you talk to them?"

"I will; but see that you do not foolishly throw away the advantage you have got. There is such a thing as being too sure, you know, and I have noticed that youthful people frequently fall into that error."

"Thank you, but if any one trusts to the youth of

my comrades and myself to bring about a blunder, they will make a mistake."

Sir Robert bowed in answer and mounted the bridge. The two ships were quite close now, and the *Cinderella's* anchor had been thrown out.

"I say, men," called Sir Robert, "you have blundered. Tell Herr Buelon I wish to talk to him."

"Herr Buelon is not able to talk, sir," answered Bankstone. "His head is split. We're all half-dead here."

"Ah! The boys proved too much for you, I presume?" Sir Robert's voice was tinged with sarcasm.

"Some of them did, but we landed them; the others we have got pretty well in hand now. We have a cargo of shell, too, but what are we to do about that gun up there?"

"I am afraid you can do nothing. As a matter of painful fact, I have to announce that we've lost considerably on this deal. This ship is in the hands of the enemy, and it is under compulsion that I am speaking now. I am requested to ask you to send all your prisoners on board this ship at once, or you will immediately be blown out of the water."

"What!" gasped a crowd of men. "Why didn't you warn us coming in?"

"Discussion is painful and useless. Kindly do as I have instructed, or say you refuse."

"Have we no chance?"

"None that I can see. We attempted a greater task than we could accomplish, that's all, and have now to pay the penalty."

"But—but can't we rush the *Queen* in our boats? They daren't fire on themselves."

"My dear Bankstone, you may try if you like, but I give you my word you'll be where all of our profession eventually go the first second after you make the attempt. Our own quick-firer is trained on you now, and by a gentleman who, from what I hear, has some reason to hope you'll give him an excuse to kill you."

"But we've got fifty ton of first-class shell!"

"Which you stole, I believe. You see the moral, Bankstone, I hope? Please begin the disembarkation."

And Bankstone did. He held a hurried conversation with his men, and shortly afterwards the dinghy was lowered and the Captain, Stansbury, Richard, and Jack were brought on deck and told to take their places therein. Probably there would have been another fight there and then, had not the sullen faces of the men made Richard believe that there was some truth in the tale they told them about the *Pacific Queen* being in the hands of their friends. However, they came on board, and were received by Tom and Mr. Preston, and if ever there was a more joyous meeting anywhere, then it must have given a pleasure of which the ordinary human mind has no conception.

But there was little time for talk. Tom told them to arm themselves, and Mr. Preston led the way to the armoury. Acting on Tom's instructions, Murray and Kotay had also come on deck and had relieved Captain Grenville, and just then both Tom and Sir Robert saw a boat push off from the mainland carrying two men and a girl.

Meanwhile the men behind the quick-firer watched the opposite deck for any signs of action, and thus things stood until Miss Preston, Thomson, and Powell were hauled on board. Words cannot describe the sur-

prise nor the pleasure the party experienced in being together again, and it would be futile to attempt to describe the various emotions of each as they realized that they had regained parents, sister, sons, friends, comrades, and ships, after it had seemed entirely hopeless to think of such a thing.

Sir Robert broke in upon the happy party: "Excuse my seeming rudeness," he said, "and allow me to offer my congratulations to you all, but I should like to remind you that your work is not yet finished."

Those of the party who had not yet seen Sir Robert turned and stared with surprise at the immaculately-dressed gentleman who had joined them. He had found time to shave himself and complete an elaborate toilet that morning, and to the others looked very dandified indeed.

"Is this another of our marooned friends?" Captain Inglis asked, surveying him critically and half-contemptuously. Powell and Jack turned away to hide a smile, and Richard looked to Tom for an explanation.

"No," answered Sir Robert before any one could speak, "I am the bold bad villain who, with my friend Herr Buelon, shares the command of this band of desperadoes whom you have captured." He bowed to Miss Preston, and continued, "Please do not needlessly insult me by supposing I am trying to make amends for my sins, or being in any way desirous of favour. I merely wish to state that the moment that other vessel came within hail I set in operation a little piece of mechanism you can't possibly find, which at the last second of the sixth hour will blow this ship to fragments."

"I'm a bit of a story-teller myself," drawled Stansbury. "I——"

"You certainly look it, young man; but I was not

addressing you. My compact was with the gentleman whom, if he will excuse the familiarity, I shall call Mr. Tom——"

"I have not forgotten, Sir Robert," said Tom, "but we shall be off the ship in good time if my engineer comrades have not lost their cunning."

"Then that is all I have to say. I really hope that you will not be troubled further by any of our organisation, and will write a letter to that effect which you can post at the first port."

"Will you tell me, please," said Richard, "if my uncle is a member of your Society?"

Mr. Preston started. "What makes you think that, Richard?" he asked anxiously.

"I would not answer your question, sir, were it not for the fact that I feel so ashamed of the actions of the people who marooned a lady, that I—well, no, I will not conclude my statement. Your uncle—I presume, of course, Mr. Preston of Worchester is the gentleman you mean—has nothing whatever to do with us, but I believe my predecessor here thought it policy to insinuate that he had."

"Thank you," said Mr. Preston, with an expression of great relief. "You have taken a great weight of trouble from my mind by your statement. I shall do all I can for you in return."

"You misunderstood me, sir. I do not wish anything done for me. This has been a nice little play, but, unlike the orthodox stage villain, I am not repentant. I will go off this planet with the limelight playing around, and the music of bursting boilers in my ears."

"I have some doubts about that," said Tom, who

had been giving some instructions while Sir Robert had been speaking, as a result of which Jack unbarred the companion-way and called down: "The presence of all you gentlemen Adventurers is required on deck. We are not your executioners, and hope to say good-bye to you shortly, therefore there is no occasion for you to carry arms. The person who does will be dealt with according to the law of the sea relating to pirates. You are requested to come in twos, with one full minute between each couple. Any one disregarding the time limit will also be dealt with without a trial. Come now!"

The party stood in line on the deck around the companion-way entrance with revolvers in each hand, and Sir Robert entered into conversation with Miss Preston. It was some time before any of the Adventurers appeared, but on Jack repeating his call, with some additional remarks from Captain Inglis and Stansbury, they began to issue forth in couples. If looks could kill, the whole ship would have been speedily annihilated, but as those in command were gifted with natures not affected by threats or looks, no harm was done, and despite the curses, threats and general bad language, each couple was marched forward and invited to descend into the hold by means of a rope-ladder, which was then pulled up until the next couple came along. In all about twenty men of every nationality were placed in the hold, but most of them were in such a state of drunkenness that they could have offered no opposition even had they had a chance. When all were down the hatches were closed excepting for a few spaces left for ventilation, and then Tom addressed Sir Robert, who seemed to be enjoying the proceedings.

"I must trouble you again, Sir Robert," Tom said. "I wish you to convey some orders to your men on the *Cinderella.*"

"Very well, your Majesty. Will you kindly formulate them?" responded Sir Robert, going on the bridge again.

"Then tell your men to go into the after-hold and remain there until further orders."

"But you surely do not expect them to do any such thing?" expostulated Sir Robert. "You can't make such a number of men do that——"

"Very well, nothing remains but to sink them. We certainly will not share our ship with them."

"Oh, you mean to transfer them afterwards? In that case I will tell them."

"Also say that if there are any carpenters or engineers among them willing to work, they may stay on deck after signifying their intentions, but if a weapon of any kind is found on them they will instantly pay the usual penalty. We can't adopt half measures with pirates."

"You might use the term Adventurers instead of that obsolete expression. Strictly speaking, we are not pirates."

"I don't think any nation's cruiser would recognise the difference," laughed Tom. "Will you do as I have said?"

"Well, personally I would rather you would shoot me. I do not care to convey further orders to any one. Still, of course, if you think my assistance is essential——"

"Which it is not," interrupted Tom. "I can speak myself." He leaped on the bridge and cried: "Gentle-

men pirates on the *Cinderella,* we are about to take over our own ship, and as we do not care that you should be free while we are doing so, I must request you to go down into the after-hold and remain there until we are finished. Any one found with arms will be shot on sight. Am I plain?"

"You are," replied Bankstone. "Mighty plain. But if we won't go down the hold?"

"I give you one minute to decide on that point," cried Tom. "Either way will please me."

"Oh, I know what that means. We'll go, but you'll have a bad time when next we get our hands on you. There will be no Herr Buelon to save you."

Here Thomson said a few words to Tom, and he at once cried: "That gentleman of course need not go below; leave him in his cabin. And, by the way, if there are any engineers or carpenters among your gang who are willing to help to make good the damage done, they can remain on deck. We shall pay them for their work, even as we shall exact recompense for any losses we have sustained from you all."

The men on the *Cinderella* seemed to hold a consultation, and Mr. Preston turned to Captain Grenville and said: "Captain, I congratulate you on your having a son like that. He was assuredly born to command, and——"

"He can command, father," said Richard, who had been talking to his sister nearly all the time after introductions had been made all around. "But all the partners can do that. They have inventions on board that ship over there, which, by the way, they raised from the bottom of the sea, that can make their fortune any time."

"Partners?" exclaimed Mr. Preston. "I hardly understand. Are they partners in any enterprise? If so, and I have still the wealth at home I previously had, I want to buy a share for you, Richard. Captain Inglis has told me something of their extraordinary abilities."

"Richard is a partner already," put in Jack, "and we don't need any one to buy interests. There were five of us originally, and——"

"Thomson," said Tom from the bridge, "do you think you can hold out on your feet a bit longer? There are some men over there who are willing to help, but we need both Powell and you to see to the work, or we can have no faith in it."

"Who said there was anything the matter with me?" growled Thomson. "I just fancy I should like to see the man who would touch the *Cinderella* without me being there—excepting, of course, Powell; he knows everything."

"Well," said Tom, "the other fellows have gone below. I am starving, and I suppose you all feel the same way. Let us get over to our own ship now, and Ah Sing will soon prepare something to eat."

"What, are you going to leave this ship, Tom?" asked Captain Grenville in surprise. "Why, we'll be powerless on board a little craft like that, crippled as she is."

"No, we won't," Captain Inglis answered. "When you know your son, sir, and his comrades as I do, you will also know that it is impossible for the partners to make a mistake. They are more than a match for all the pirates that ever sailed."

"And what about me, pray?" inquired Sir Robert. "I cannot promise not to liberate my men."

"We won't ask you," said Tom. "We'll take you with us. Thomson tells me Herr Buelon has had an accident, and as my father says you have medical skill, doubtless you will be glad to attend to your friend."

By this time Powell and Kotay had got into the *Cinderella's* dinghy lying alongside, and soon they were pulling towards their own ship with Captain Inglis, Jack, and Mr. Preston also on board. They lost no time in climbing on deck and setting their crew free, and then battened down the hatches on their prisoners as had been done on the *Pacific Queen.* The rest of the party soon followed on one of the other vessel's boats, and while the dinghy went back for Murray, Thomson and Powell sailed round the *Cinderella's* stern to inspect the damage. It took them only a very short time to determine what should be done, and coming on board again they instructed those who had been willing to help them to make a temporary rudder. There was nothing on the *Cinderella* from which a substitute could be improvised, however, and a working party went on board the *Pacific Queen* and hauled down the woodwork and iron girders of some of its cabins, and also borrowed a quantity of tools. Murray meanwhile had disarranged the gear of the gun in the *Pacific Queen's* bows, and removed the pin in the connecting-rod of the high-press engine, and came on board the *Cinderella* to render trained assistance. Tom, after consultation with Ah Sing, who complained bitterly of the havoc made among his stores by the Adventurers, sent another party to the *Pacific Queen* under command of Kotay to make good

the shortage, and also to supplement their luxuries if possible, in view of the fact that they were now to have guests, including a lady, on the *Cinderella.*

Thomson and Powell were working like Trojans at the stern all the time, and when Murray came on board he immediately gave his attention to the steering-gear, forging new links for the broken chain in a marvellous manner with the aid of Aquinili and the boiler fires. The rest of the crew had set about their duties with a will, their delight at being again free and under their old masters being easily manifest in the alacrity with which they worked. Thus an hour passed, and then another. Steam was fast rising on the *Cinderella's* gauges, and Ah Sing had signified that he had some preparation ready, but the rudder was not yet finished, and it was now approaching noon.

Suddenly Tom turned to Sir Robert. That individual had been below with Herr Buelon, but had now come on deck.

"I regret having to state," said Tom, "that only two of the six hours' truce now remain, and we are not getting ready fast enough."

"I regret the fact too, my boy, but I warned you, and, well—what do you expect of me?"

"Nothing, only I thought that seeing you will not have the chance of being blown up with that ship at the expiry of six hours, you might not care to see those on board suffer that fate."

"But you cannot object to my going on board with them? It will save you inconvenience——"

"But we do object. You are a hostage, and besides I learn that your men broke their word shamefully with

our fellows, and therefore I have no intention of being too nice with them."

"You have no right to make me a coward, sir. Herr Buelon has informed me that his orders were disregarded by his subordinates, and we both desire to be placed on board the *Pacific Queen* in order to——"

"Which you won't. We cannot be party to any such massacre, and I therefore inform you that we can't sail until our rudder is finished. Our engineers are worn out and not likely to get it completed before the six hours are up. I promise you, and like yourself I keep my word, that when we are ready, the—gentlemen—of your party at present on board this ship will be transferred to the *Pacific Queen,* and we'll call all things square for the time. Now, for obvious reasons we shall keep both you and Herr Buelon on this ship until we reach the nearest port, where you will be put on shore."

"Why do you tell me all this? It is not British to taunt a helpless prisoner."

"I am not taunting you. Can't you see I am trying to give your gang a chance? Look around, every man—and woman—of our party is working. Order your men to help and we will be ready in time, but first make yourself answerable for them, for we are not strong enough to guard them as well as carry on the work."

"My dear boy, they would not obey me when they saw how weak you were. Why not call in those you have up the mountain beside the gun?"

"Because we have no one there. The gun is fired electrically."

"You don't mean to say that this ship was struck by a shot she was the means of firing herself?"

"I did not say so, and I cannot give you any further information on the subject. If you cannot answer for your men, of course, we need say no more."

"If the Adventurers' engineers turn out and do your work, what do they get in return?"

"The liberty to return to their ship whenever we can sail, and thus be in time to save their comrades by stopping your deadly machine. I presume they know where it is?"

"Oh, I could instruct them." Sir Robert paused and reflected. "I'll tell you," he said at length. "I would like to save the poor beggars if it were possible; they'll all be hanged sooner or later of course, but that's neither here nor there. Call up all your own men and make them stand guard over my scoundrels. They will do your work, for some of them are very clever emergency men—they have to be at times—and I will be relieved of responsibility; but I warn you to keep your eye on them."

"Then order them up," said Tom. "Let them know the state of affairs, and I will gather in the *Cinderella's* people."

Sir Robert bent over the hatch and called on a dozen men by name to come on deck, and Tom mustered the *Cinderella's* force excepting Thomson and Powell, who insisted on keeping at their work over the screw.

"You are in a somewhat strange position, boys," Sir Robert said to the Adventurers. "You will be free to leave this ship and go on board the *Pacific Queen*, and after that do as you like, when this ship has been

made ready to sail. I would not have called upon you but for the fact that unless you get on board your own ship before one hour fifty-three minutes and some seconds have expired, the *Pacific Queen* will be scattered in pieces over the ocean. I have set my automatic firer —which some of you know about—in the usual place. Now you know everything, your duty is to get this craft away in time for you to be able to stop that machine."

"There ain't no chance of swimming for it now, boss?" asked one.

"Not the slightest, as you will see if you look round. You had best do as I have suggested. You'll find that rudder post is twisted badly and requires straightening, and you will also have to finish and ship that new rudder lying there. You may also examine the screw and the steering-gear."

"That has been attended to already," said Murray.

"All right, sir," cried one of the men, apparently a leading engineer. "We can have her right in fifty minutes." He picked up a hammer and chisel and began cutting through an iron bar preparatory to fixing it across the improvised rudder, and his comrades at once set about making good other damages, some going over the side to see what was required there. Thomson and Powell were working under the stern; they had a dinghy underneath them, but they were perched high up on a beam they had swung with ropes from above. They were glad of assistance, nevertheless, although it was rather a strange sensation, as Powell remarked, for them "to have pirates as mates." The pirates knew their business, all the same, and soon the fellow-feeling among engineers spread among them, and they laughed and chatted as if they were at a bench in a workshop, com-

pletely ignoring by tacit consent the relations in which they stood to each other.

Meanwhile the steam was rising in the *Cinderella's* boilers, and Murray had examined the engines thoroughly.

"We'll be finished in ten minutes," Thomson cried to Tom, as the latter leaned over the rail and inquired how things were progressing. And they were. Murray took a turn out of the engines to see that all was right, and Captain Inglis tried the steering powers. Everything was right.

"Get into the boats now, gentlemen," cried Tom, "but don't push off until your comrades are with you. You have still three-quarters of an hour to spare."

Those who had been working swarmed into the *Pacific Queen's* boat at once and waited, every available revolver covering them meanwhile. The *Cinderella's* largest boat was then hurriedly lowered, and the rest of the men from below bundled into it.

"You need not bring that boat back," cried Tom, as Inglis sprang to the bridge. "We can do without it."

Thomson and Powell climbed on board and the dinghy was hauled up.

"Full speed ahead," rang the engine-room bell. Murray responded by throwing wide the throttle valves, and the *Cinderella* glided away. Immediately after Ah Sing's gong sounded, and every one suddenly remembered they had had nothing to eat for the last twenty-four hours.

## CHAPTER XV

# The Adventurers Find the Island

PROUDLY the *Cinderella* danced over the deep blue swell. The afternoon sun was still striving to send its shafts of light through the great banks of clouds which were every minute growing denser and darker overhead. Soon they would burst again and the rain would pour down mercilessly and steadily until next morning. But if the clouds were heavy, hearts were light, and in two days' sail the *Cinderella* would be out of the zone of the rainy weather

Strangely enough the boys did not now seem to care to go down to the saloon for dinner. They remembered the untidy state in which they had left it, and also felt that now that they had a lady on board some change in their sodden dilapidated garments was necessary before they could present themselves. Besides, they felt that they had no time to waste in eating; cabins had to be arranged for their guests, and many other things required their attention. Finally it was agreed that Richard and Tom should dress and attend to their guests, while the others who could be spared off duty should set to work to provide suitable accommodation for them.

Perhaps this arrangement was the best under the circumstances, and hastily swallowing some food in the

pantry the tireless Thomson, with Jack, Stansbury, Kotay and the intelligent Aquinili, started to work again. In the saloon soon after, Mr. Preston with his son and daughter, Captain Grenville and his son, and Mr. Murray the hardy thoughtful engineer, sat down to lunch. Tom whispered a few words to Richard and then to his father, who seemed to assent to what he said, and Richard went out, returning shortly with Sir Robert. The last-named found it extremely difficult to sustain his imperturbability, and it was with a slight suspicion of a flush on his face that he said: "Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for asking me to join you here, but—er—I, that is—while personally our relations together have always been pleasant, there have been some little matters which should perhaps cause this to be a happy reunion in which my presence can only be a jarring note. With your permission I will therefore retire and join my friend Herr Buelon in the cabin so kindly given over to him."

"Sir Robert," said Tom, "on behalf of myself and comrades I may say that we bear you no ill-will. What Mr. Preston and my father have against you they are content to waive for the present. No family matters shall be discussed here just now because my comrades and I, after attending to you all, must go and help the others. Afterwards, when we have everything well in hand, we may hear each other's stories."

Sir Robert sat down, and Ah Sing brought in what he had so hurriedly prepared. There were no ceremonies at the lunch; every one knew that a great deal of work had to be done, and also realised that they were by no means safe from pursuit. Thus at the very earliest moment Tom and Richard excused themselves and

left to assist the others. Murray also insisted on taking Powell's place by the engines, thereby setting free another valuable worker.

But neither Mr. Preston, Captain Grenville nor Miss Preston was disposed to allow their rescuers to do all the work, and arming themselves with tools the two gentlemen set to work with an energy and skill that showed their six years' enforced residence on the island had not been entirely without result. Miss Preston had seen much room for improvement in the saloon, and when the ever-cheerful Ah Sing had cleared the dishes away, she began to make alterations which very soon gave the little apartment a different aspect. In this Ah Sing, as soon as he had finished his own special duties, joined her; and Sir Robert, after making several attempts to render assistance and being coldly ignored each time, went on deck.

"You Missy Pleston?" asked Ah Sing as he swept out the floor.

"Yes; what is your name?" answered the lady, smiling.

"Ah Sing, blamee good cookee. Makee all solt of things out of ole boots."

"Indeed; you must be very clever."

"Oh yes, vely clevel. Can make ladies' dlesses too. Like help you if you want any. Lots of pletty libbons an' silk an' shoes on ship now. Misel Tom tellee me to tellee you an' show you them. He tellee me maybe you takee what you wantee. All youls."

"Did he?" cried the girl eagerly. "You have ribbons and silks and shoes on board for me? Where are they? Take me to them. I should like a pair of shoes very much."

"Oh, we have lots of things on this ship. Got boxes of chocolate too. Come with me."

Miss Preston looked round to see if anything else claimed her attention, but everything was now to her mind, so she followed Ah Sing with all the eagerness of a school-girl to where all sorts of finery had been laid out for her.

"This is Misel Tom's cabin," said Ah Sing. "He tellee me tellee you he give it to you."

"Oh, what a lot of nice things," she cried in delight. "Are they all for me?"

"Allee youls. Misel Tom say you blame well have evelything you want on *Cindelella*. Ah Sing must lun now, he lot wulluk befo' get dinnel leady fo' to-night. He makee blamee good dinnel allee same, an' when you wantee me you callee me." The Celestial ran off to the galley, and Miss Preston revelled among her new possessions, which included everything in the way of ladies' requirements that the chief lady saleswoman in the largest emporium in Sydney could suggest.

Many hands make light work, and the boys found their tasks nearing completion much sooner than they had expected. They had fitted up and furnished several empty cabins which had hitherto been used as storerooms, placed in them all the small articles they possessed which tend to make a place home-like, and connected the electric light. Nor had they forgotten their wounded guest Herr Buelon, Powell having fitted an electric bell by which he could call any one when he desired. He was now in a state of high fever, however, and Sir Robert appeared to be much concerned about him.

When all was finished it was late in the afternoon,

and the boys ran off to make themselves more presentable, for as yet they had hardly exchanged more than a dozen words with their guests, while Miss Preston had not even been seen except from a distance by some of them. Seeing that they could be of no more service below, Mr. Preston and Captain Grenville went on deck and watched the island which had been their home so long fade into the mist.

"I can't realise that we are actually free men among our own people and on board a civilised ship," Mr. Preston remarked to his companion. "It all seems like a dream from which I will awaken soon, and either find myself back on the island planting potatoes, or on board that pirate ship just disappearing down on the stern now."

"I feel much the same way myself," said Captain Grenville. "I can't understand things at all. Our sons have grown into men, and of a type, to say the least, extraordinary. How came they to be sailing in these parts with a steam yacht of their own, manned by themselves and comrades—and such comrades? Why, they are all boys but Captain Inglis, and he is not very much more——" He stopped and sniffed the air. "There is one thing that would convince me that things are real," he continued, "and that is a good cigar, and unless my senses are playing me tricks the aroma of an excellent one is in the air now."

"Why, yes, Grenville, the Captain is smoking one now. Dear me! I've got quite a craving for a smoke. I wonder if he would think it odd if we should ask him for one."

"Here he comes himself. I see he has been relieved by a junior officer in full regimentals. This yacht looks

as if it were owned by a syndicate of millionaires, judging by the flashiness of its officers."

"Good-evening, gentlemen," spoke Captain Inglis, walking aft to them. "I am sorry if I have appeared to have neglected you, but I had to take the ship out, and being probably the most useless man below I took a double watch on the bridge."

"Captain Inglis," said Mr. Preston, "my friend Captain Grenville and I have had sufficient time on that island back there to learn how to appreciate sterling qualities in a man. While we were eating and drinking and shirking our share of responsibility, you alone looked after our safety, and taking everything upon yourself have brought us out of the reach of our enemies——"

"Hold hard, sir," interrupted Inglis. "I am only a very ordinary mud-scraping skipper; I did nothing to deserve such credit. But, by the great Federal City, I am ready to go back and fight the pirates if the boys say the word! Wonderful boys those sons of yours, gentlemen, but then all the partners are that. Why, I shouldn't be surprised in the slightest if they built wings on this craft and flew the rest of our journey. They can do anything. But I am forgetting again—I have some fairly good cigars if you would care to try them. I was the only smoker on board, but I am sure Captain Grenville smokes."

"I did, Inglis, but I have almost forgotten the way," laughed Captain Grenville, accepting a cigar from Inglis's case. "We didn't grow them in our little garden, although I think Murray tried to cultivate the tobacco plant."

"Ah," sighed Mr. Preston, blowing a cloud of fra-

grant smoke into the air. "This is happiness now. This is real, Grenville."

"There is not much doubt about the cigar at anyrate," responded Captain Grenville. "But if you have a minute or so to spare, Captain Inglis, you might enlighten us on one or two points. How do we happen to be here, for instance? What sort of ship is this? To whom does it belong, and where are its officers and crew? We have only seen yourself and that young gentleman on the bridge now."

"The partners officer and engineer this ship themselves with the exception of Stansbury and myself," said Captain Inglis. "It belongs to them, for they raised it from the bottom of the sea themselves."

"The partners! Who are they?" asked Mr. Preston. "It all sounds so strange that yet I fear to find it a dream."

"Not much dream about them, sir. There are five of them, and I reckon they're equal to any number of people. They are all boys, too. It is only about five weeks or so since I met them first down in Sydney, but I feel as if I had known them for ages."

"But why were they in Sydney? What were they doing there, and what induced them, and how did they manage to raise the ship from the ocean?"

"Now you are asking conundrums. I met them first along with a reporter fellow who seemed to have heard strange yarns about them. We chummed up a bit, and after they raised the *Cinderella*—they bought her at a sale—they offered me the chance of being her skipper. It was only when we were well out to sea that they told me to head for 158° 5′ by 4° 2′ 3″. And, by the Southern Cross, they were prepared to make me do so

if I had objected! Of course I had suspected they were on a filibustering game, and as it was all the same to me I did as they wished. Afterwards I was told that young Grenville had received a message in a bottle from his father giving him the position I mentioned as being that of a pearl-shell island, but as we sailed north we discovered that we were watched by some strange gang who evidently knew of the same island, but did not know where it was."

"No," laughed Captain Grenville, "they couldn't find it on the face of the waters, and we would not tell them. After a time they stopped looking for it, but they seemed to have decided on making another attempt some time ago, and all the old gang who mutinied and then marooned us came back with some new men, many of whom appeared to be gentlemen with what I should call a twist in their mental powers, so that their ideas of right and wrong were sadly out of perspective. But go on with your story, Captain. I remember sending several messages to Tom and other people in bottles, but we found most of them afterwards thrown back upon the shore."

"Well, we soon discovered that we had somehow run against a gang of modern pirates, whose influence was such that they had managed to keep their existence a secret so far, and when we came to the island——"

"Where I said it was?" asked Captain Grenville.

"Exactly—" Inglis looked round in the fast-falling darkness and then continued in a slightly louder tone of voice—"and found it wasn't there. There is no island within twenty-five miles of the position."

"But I assure you we saw the island ourselves," said Mr. Preston, "and a Manillaman on board dived down

and brought up some exquisite pearl shell. We could see them quite plainly from the deck too——"

"Excuse me, gentlemen," interrupted a voice, and Sir Robert came forward, "I am so interested in the few chance words which I could not help hearing that I must save my honour by letting you know I am here."

"Oh, it seems, then, that your trouble was wasted after all," laughed Captain Grenville. "Even the wonderful boys you were good enough to tell us about while we were your guests on our own old ship could not find the pearl island."

"I am not quite so sure of that," said Sir Robert. "They have on board at this moment fifty tons of shell which they must have obtained in a very short time."

"The boys you speak of, sir, are my owners," said Captain Inglis coldly. "They have means of getting pearl shell without wasting time hunting the face of the ocean for islands."

"I would give two or three average fortunes to know where that island has gone," Sir Robert mused. "Would you kindly convey that information to your owners?"

"No, I will not," cried Inglis. "I know them too well to do any such thing, and if you meant to suggest that I might benefit by giving you the information, I would like to tell you, sir, that there is not enough gold in the Bank of England and the exchequer of the Adventurers combined to tempt me to go back on my young friends. We beat you at your own game, and we'll beat you next time too."

"Are you a partner?" asked Sir Robert suavely, lighting a cigar.

"No, I am only a very ordinary paid skipper."

"Ah, then perhaps you had powerful friends in Australia who got you associated with the boys?"

"I have no friends in this world, sir, except my mother, who would care much whether I went to Davy Jones or not. But I fail to see the reason of your sudden interest."

"Well, I'll tell you. It seems that neither Captain Grenville nor Mr. Preston knows where the island is, and it might therefore be as well non-existent if it can't be found. Now, I happen to be endowed with more wealth than most people, and Herr Buelon is also overburdened with the stuff that men sell their souls to obtain—ah, you are smiling, I assure you we are enormously wealthy——"

"We do not doubt that," said Mr. Preston. "We were smiling at your virtuous indignation at the idea that men should be willing to exchange their all for money."

"Well, isn't it a pity. What more can they get from life by so doing?"

"Oh, we've had enough of that," cried Captain Inglis in disgust, and Captain Grenville looked at Sir Robert as though he thought he had gone mad.

"Yet we have had dealings with people lately," said Captain Grenville pointedly, "who committed the most unpardonable crimes, and it seems that some of them did not even have the excuse of needing money. You would make any one smile, sir; I suppose piracy is to you quite an honourable profession, and its accompanying crimes works of charity?"

"By no means. Piracy is a crime for which one deserves to be punished. I never tried to justify it."

"But you are a common low-down pirate yourself,"

put in Captain Inglis, "and ought to be strung from the yard-arm."

"You are unkind, Captain; I may deserve all you say, but I was never a common low-down pirate. I was one of the first body of Adventurers, and they were gentlemen. Our blood called for an excitement that could not be found in hunting down defenceless quadrupeds in Central Africa or elsewhere, and the world lay before us. We scorned money, for we had more than we could use. What then was open to us? What could satisfy the fierce insatiable poison in our blood? Only adventure wherein we pitted ourselves against powers stronger than we were, and where all our wits would be called upon to make up the deficiency. This promised royal sport, and we founded the organisation of the Twentieth Century Adventurers, a world-wide brotherhood embracing all those wild spirits who found life as it was too tame."

"How noble!" exclaimed Captain Grenville sarcastically. "How glorious a sport for those brave daring people you talk of to attack helpless ships, and how fierce the excitement must have been in joining a private yacht as members of the crew, and casting its owner, his little daughter, his captain and chief engineer upon a Pacific island——"

"Believe me, sir, I knew nothing about that. It certainly was never intended that we should come down to making war upon people weaker than ourselves. We fought big insurance companies and governments. We did not recognise the right of any one nation to proclaim any part of the ocean as belonging to them exclusively, and therefore became filibusters as well. But why go on? We have degenerated. Only Herr

Buelon, a few others scattered over the globe, and myself are all that remain of the original Adventurers, and I admit that we cannot offer a word in favour of the Society as it now exists."

"Then why not leave it?" asked Mr. Preston.

"Because I said I would find that mysterious island, and with Herr Buelon vowed I would remain among our scoundrel companions until we did find it. Now I am back to where we started, and you know why I want the island. I am ready to pay any money for the knowledge as to its position, Captain; I could then hand it over to the others and call myself square with them."

"Well, sir," said Inglis, "if you go on looking for that island until you find it I am of opinion you will look a mighty long time."

"But you know of it—I mean the people of this ship?"

"Do we?" The Captain laughed and muttered something to himself, and at that moment the night clouds burst and the rain came down and quickly cleared every one but the officer on duty off the deck. As they descended the electric lights were switched on and Ah Sing ran round the ship with his gong. "Only dlessing gong—only dlessing gong," he was crying, quite oblivious of the fact that the noise he made with his gong drowned his words.

Meanwhile the partners were making elaborate toilets in their cabins, for at dinner that evening they would meet their guests as civilised young gentlemen for the first time. The fact that a lady would grace the table too, caused their preparations to be more complete than was perhaps necessary under the circumstances, although none would have admitted it. Half

an hour later Ah Sing sent his noisy summons round the ship again, and in response the largest party that had ever dined on the *Cinderella* trooped into the saloon. All were there except Stansbury; he, of course, could not leave the bridge. The engines had been entrusted to the care of Aquinili after a severe mental struggle had been undergone by Thomson, who should have been on duty. Herr Buelon was also there; he had made a rapid recovery since he had been under the care of his friend.

The *Cinderella* rolled and pitched considerably, but nobody seemed to mind, and every one was in the best of spirits. Miss Preston had arrayed herself in a wonderful dress she had constructed from the material placed at her disposal, and all the boys thought her simply perfect. Thomson, however, was nothing if not practical, and after he had gazed at her for the twentieth time in admiration, he turned to Jack at his side and said: "She is certainly a very pretty girl and a credit to Richard to have such a sister, but what beats me is how did she manage to build that dress, and what do you call that stuff it's made of?"

"Shut up," Jack whispered. "You don't rivet up dresses, and how can any man know the name of the stuff in a lady's dress. It will be linoleum, or crêpe de chine, or cretonne, or something of that sort."

Thomson thought Jack was guessing, but soon got into a conversation with the veteran engineer, Murray, on the improvements in engines and boilers during the last few years, and forgot all about Miss Preston.

Not so Tom, however; he was the only one of the boys who did not seem bashful, and Captain Inglis smiled as he saw how interested the two appeared to

be in each other. Both Sir Robert and Herr Buelon experienced very strange emotions as bit by bit the history of the boys' expedition and the story of the castaways were made known to all, and had it not been for the reiterated statements of Mr. Preston and Captain Grenville that Sir Robert and Herr Buelon had treated them as guests while on board the *Pacific Queen,* and had several times prevented their subordinates from using compulsion to make them disclose the position of the island, the fiery Thomson would have made things unpleasant for them.

Outside the storm raged fiercely, but inside the well-ventilated and well-lit saloon all were happy and cared little for the unpleasantness of the ship's motion.

"How are we heading now, Captain?" asked Tom, towards the end of the meal. "I forgot that we had not decided what port we should make."

"We are heading south, sir," answered Captain Inglis. "There was no time to inquire when we sailed where you wished to go, but unless you wish to hit the Canadian or United States mail line on the east or the German port of Astolabe in New Guinea on the west, our course is correct for all other ports in Australia, New Zealand, or the Fijis."

The telephone which had been connected between the bridge, engine-room, and saloon, called for attention at that moment, and Powell rose to answer it.

"You are wanted, Captain," he said a moment later. "Mr. Stansbury thinks the weather is changing and wishes instructions about something or other."

Captain Inglis stepped to the telephone. "What is it, Stansbury?" he said.

"Is that you, Captain?" called the voice at the other end.

"Yes, of course. What is it?"

"Give me some proof that it is you."

"Dear me! I'll come on deck and then you'll soon feel pretty sure."

"No, no. Don't do that unless you have decided to let the other people know what I heard them being refused to-night already by you. Stay in the saloon and keep the others there except perhaps one of the boys. Who is skipper on the *Marboo?*"

"Seymour, of course. What has that got to do with the business?"

"Nothing, except that I know whom I am talking to now. There is a big steamer's light directly in our course. I think it is the German cruiser, and we can't afford to be overhauled this time seeing we have a cargo on board."

"That's true enough. I'll come up."

"I thought that we should swing round and run round the north end of the Solomons. We should reach Samarai in British New Guinea that way in three days."

"But that course would take us almost over — Yes, you're right."

"I will swing her round gently, and no one will know when we altered the course even if they do notice the difference when they come on deck; the stars are all hidden anyway."

"All right, Stansbury; you will be relieved presently. Do as you have said."

The Captain sat down again, and did his best to promote conversation of a general nature, and during

this Richard, in answer to his signal, excused himself to go on duty.

Meanwhile Stansbury had thrown the *Cinderella* round in a long circling course, and when Richard appeared by his side he was bringing her up to a north by north-west course. He silently pointed over the stern to the lights of the big vessel just visible far to the south, and soon made Richard understand that they were running for another passage through the Solomons which would take them back past their pearling grounds. "Captain Inglis," he explained, "agrees that it is best that our two Adventurer guests should not know where we are, so that if they are calculating by time as to where we should be at any hour they will be thrown out of their reckoning by this doubling on our course. It will also throw the pirates into the hands of the Germans should they come after us, which I happen to know both Sir Robert and Herr Buelon expect."

"But couldn't we get past the cruiser by sailing to the east or west?" asked Richard.

"Yes, if we cared to go right round Malayta. They are watching the passage we came through coming up. It is, however, much sooner and safer, now that we know where we are, to go back and round the north-western end of Ysabel Island."

And so the partners thought when a couple of hours later they assembled on the bridge with Captain Inglis. The rain had ceased for a brief space, and the bridge was the only place where they were sure of not being overheard, for they did not wish their guests to know that trouble might yet overtake them in the shape of a German warship. As for Sir Robert and Herr Buelon, Captain Inglis had a wholesale distrust of them. "They

are only common pirates, boys," he said, "no matter what they call themselves. No doubt they think it safer now to play the part of the wealthy gentlemen fond of adventure and all that sort of thing. But my advice to you all is, let them know nothing of what we have done or intend doing; they'll likely find it out for themselves anyhow."

There was a certain amount of wisdom in the Captain's words, and the partners agreed that it was wiser to keep their two Adventurer friends in ignorance of their plans. Having decided that they would make for Samarai, and thence proceed to Thursday Island in Torres Strait, where they could dispose of their cargo, all not on duty went to bed completely tired out. It was over forty hours since they had rested last, and much had been done in that time.

The gallant *Cinderella* sailed on in the darkness of night, and near midnight Captain Inglis was awakened by the Kanaka on duty.

"Him boss on top want you, sir," the man said. "Him say no make noise."

"All right," responded the Captain, turning out at once. "I'll be on deck in no time."

Hurrying out after the man the Captain soon stood beside Richard. The rain was falling again, and Richard was tired, sleepy, and drenched to the skin.

"I am sorry I slept over my time," the Captain said. "How is the course?"

"North by north-west, sir," replied Richard. "But I didn't send for you to relieve me. What do you make of that over on the starboard?"

The Captain levelled his night-glasses in the direction Richard indicated and kept them to his eyes for

a full minute. He saw a number of lights appearing and disappearing as they were hidden in the trough of the swell or borne upon its crest.

"This part of the world is getting as thick with traffic as a mail route," the Captain growled. "That is a suspicious-looking craft. She carries no masthead lights; she is travelling fast too. By the Great G.R., I believe she is that confounded pirate again!"

"Just what I thought," said Richard, "so I ordered the Kanaka who roused you to put out all lights. I don't think they could have seen us, and if they did get a glimpse of our lights they'll never dream it is us."

"Well, go down and turn in. I'll send for you if things develop. We're not going to worry ourselves over a pirate craft that we have already beaten."

Richard was too tired to make further comment, and went below at once. The lights approached rapidly and passed quite close, apparently the ship bearing them being southward bound. Inglis watched them recede until suddenly they became lost to sight, then he made a careful calculation by aid of a tiny screened electric lamp and smiled to himself. He could just see high among the clouds in the east north-east a dull red glow, and a cloud parting at the moment disclosed the distant summit of the volcano.

"Captaine, sir," spoke a voice underneath the bridge. "Captaine, I think I want speak good to you." The voice was that of the man who had been doing deck duty.

"All right," said Inglis. "Come up and out with it."

"No think fellow talk slow an' say, er—er—much good," went on the Kanaka, coming on the bridge.

"You tell me put all lights out. I put all lights out. He say to me what for I do that? I say to him Capitaine's orders. He laugh an' walk away."

"What?" cried the Captain. "Was he on deck?"

"My word, you bet. Him stand at stern of ship. After he go away I go away, but no like him an' I go back quiet an' see him there again. He no see me an' he light something in his hand which make big 'lectric light. I come here an' tell you. Him there now."

"Pete," spoke the Captain, and his voice was hard, "do you see that star through that big cloud above the fore-mast?"

"Yes, sir, Capitaine."

"Well, I want you to stand here and take this wheel in your hand. When the mast moves to one side of the star turn the wheel until it comes back, but keep the mast always under the star. You understand?"

"You bet, sir. I steer ship before. I know." The Kanaka took the wheel, and the Captain rang up the engine-room on the telephone.

It was answered immediately.

"Who's on duty just now?" asked the Captain.

"Murray. I am letting the laddies have a much-needed rest," came the reply. "Anything wrong?"

"Yes. Don't say a word, but come on deck at once." Next instant the Captain had dropped lightly to the deck, and with noiseless feet ran along towards the stern. A man was leaning over the rail; in his hands were two burning pieces of magnesium wire, and vivid flashes lit up the ocean like an electric lamp for a considerable distance in the wake of the vessel. He held his hands in a peculiar position, and evidently was signalling to something unseen. But if so, his message

ceased abruptly, for like a wild cat Captain Inglis sprang at him and hauled him back on the deck. The man was as lithe as a piece of spring steel, however, and twisting out of the Captain's grip he turned and closed with him again on equal terms. The two men swayed in deadly silence and in total darkness. "You skulking treacherous snake!" gasped Inglis, as he lifted his opponent off his feet and endeavoured to throw him.

"Save your wind, old man, you'll need it," said the other, wriggling out of grips and seizing the Captain in arms that closed on him like a vice. "I never consented to come with you quietly, and my parole expired at two o'clock this afternoon."

With a great effort of strength the Captain tried to throw the encircling arms off, but the man only laughed. "You can't do it," he said. "I have never met the man yet who could get out of my clutch. You are going overboard."

"There you are wrong!" spluttered Inglis. "How about this?" He turned his right foot around the other's leg and pushed with all his strength away from him. For a moment the man resisted the strain, but his balance was already upset and he moved back ever so slightly, but quite enough to be tripped by the Captain's leg, and both men fell heavily to the deck and rolled over and over still in each other's grip. They were both breathless, and each wondered if he could outlast the other. Then suddenly each slackened hold and felt for the other's throat. That was about the last effort they could put forth, and as their hands closed with deadly intent they knew that it was but a question of who could hold out the longer. Captain Inglis set his teeth and squeezed harder, and then suddenly

found himself released. He sat up and saw Murray pulling his opponent away, and then Thomson, Captain Grenville, and Jack rushed up and assisted him to rise.

"What is it? Are you hurt?" asked Thomson.

"No, I'll be all right in a minute. Let me get a breath or two. He was signalling to the pirates. Go to the wheel, some one."

Captain Grenville at once complied.

"Man, how did you no' say whaur the trouble was an' I wad hae seen to it," spoke Murray. "I had to go on the bridge before I kent you were back here."

"Oh, it's all over now anyway."

"No, it isn't," laughed the man Murray held firmly. "They are on you now. They will ram you in a few minutes."

"What—Sir Robert!" cried Jack in surprise. "What is the meaning of this?"

"The meaning is, young man, that you thought to keep the fact that the course was altered to yourselves, and forgot that my parole expired long ago. Taking both together I saw I was breaking no trust in flashing a piece of magnesium wire. I have done so, and very soon I shall be able to entertain you all on the *Pacific Queen* again. I bear you no grudge, Captain, you did your duty; but your grip is very uncomfortable."

"It will be a bit more so the next time. Take him away, boys, and put him in irons."

"You really should not give that order, Captain; my boys may deal very harshly with you when they discover their leader in that position."

"Discover you? They'll discover the island before they do that."

"Oh, I venture to think you are wrong. See that

black shape rushing through the darkness close astern just now. Look for a moment and you'll see it. That is the *Pacific Queen,* with masked lights. She is chasing you in response to my signal, and she can travel seventeen knots. I think I will know where that island is before very long now."

"Leave him alone, boys," Captain Inglis said abruptly. "Switch on the lights, some one."

"I see the thing now," cried Jack excitedly. "They will run us down directly."

"Thomson," continued the Captain, and a new light shone in his eyes, "go and stand by the engines. Mr. Murray, will you kindly awaken every one on board except Miss Preston?"

"Oh, if you think you can fight," said Sir Robert, "let me assure you haven't the slightest chance. The *Pacific Queen* carries half-a-dozen quick-firers in her hold, and her men will be raging demons now. Do not, I entreat you, endanger yourselves needlessly by attempting to resist."

But Captain Inglis had departed to the bridge.

"Captain Grenville," he said, as he relieved that gentleman at the wheel, "that volcano peak you can just see on our starboard is six thousand five hundred feet in height; we are fifteen feet above water here. Kindly work out the distance between its base centre and our position."

Captain Grenville seized a sextant and with trained hands adjusted it. "Our angle is 2¼ degrees," he said. "That is"—he figured out something rapidly—"that is almost exactly twenty-five miles we are distant."

"Thank you," said Captain Inglis. "That is what I made it." He threw the wheel round, and brought

the peak in line exactly due east; then he laughed aloud.

The *Cinderella* was now ablaze with light, and the craft following, seeing that there was no longer any need to hide, flashed her lights over the water. All eyes were turned upon the swift monster flying through the ocean; she looked gigantic as her bows towered above the *Cinderella's* stern, and the boys grimly waited the moment when those bows would smash into them.

"Half speed," rang out the engine bell, and instantly Thomson slowed his engines in response.

"What does the Captain mean?" cried Jack. "They'll hit us harder if we slow down."

"He has lost his head with the excitement," sneered Sir Robert. "But don't be alarmed, my young friends, the *Pacific Queen* will not really ram us; they know Herr Buelon and I are here or they would have fired long ago. You will be well looked after, and when you let me know where that island is you will be landed at any port you please."

"You will have no interest in our doings at any rate," said Tom, who had now come up. "At the moment of impact I will shoot you." He raised his revolver to Sir Robert's head and all waited.

"You want to know where the pearl island is, Sir Robert?" cried Captain Inglis from the bridge.

"Ah, I thought you would tell. Quick, then, so that I can stop the *Pacific Queen*——"

"The *Pacific Queen* has just discovered it for herself, as I told you she would," shouted the Captain. He seized the telegraph lever and rang down "Stop!" to the engine-room.

The assembled crowd on the *Cinderella* gazed in

non-comprehending astonishment at what they saw, and their sense of hearing added to their unbounded bewilderment.

The *Pacific Queen* had stopped, a dull ripping grinding sound filled the air, and then the shrieks of frenzied men resounded. As they watched she heeled over on her side until her decks were almost perpendicular, the dense cloud of smoke pouring from her funnel suddenly became white, and volumes of steam burst from her decks. Next moment there was a terrific sea-shaking report, and her funnel and the entire central part of the ship was blown into the air. In a moment the boys understood everything. Captain Inglis had led the *Pacific Queen* across the submerged island; its highest point reached to within two and a half fathoms of the surface, which the light *Cinderella* had safely sailed over but on which the deeper draught *Pacific Queen* had left her bottom.

A shout from Jack made them withdraw their eyes for a moment. They saw Sir Robert standing on the *Cinderella's* rail. "Good-bye, gentlemen," he cried. "You have beaten us in all points, but I have found the island." He plunged into the raging sea before any one could move to stay him, and in the light of the *Cinderella's* tail lamp they say him swimming towards the wrecked vessel.

"They're in no danger," said Captain Inglis, "and we'd better be moving again; besides, some of us will be needing sleep." He pointed to the south as he spoke where the mast-head lights of a big steamer were fast coming nearer. "That is the German cruiser," he continued. "They will attend to our pirate friends, and it is time we were not here."

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"NEXT MOMENT THERE WAS A TERRIFIC SEA-SHAKING REPORT"

"Full speed ahead!" rang out as he spoke, and like a thing of life the *Cinderella* gathered herself together and leaped forward.

The lights of the cruiser were close to the submerged island before they had gone far. . . .

Next morning a warm sun played over the waves, and at dinner that day Tom said: "It is only fitting, perhaps, that I should say our expedition has been successful in every way. Some of us have regained those mourned for as lost, and all of us have made profit out of our co-partnership. I find I have over a hundred pearls, which Mr. Murray tells me are worth from one to five hundred pounds each; that with our shell should make a substantial return to the seven partners."

"Seven?" said Captain Inglis. "There are only five of you."

"Five originally," answered Tom, "but they had power to add to that figure, and they have decided that it is very desirable that Captain Inglis and his junior officer, Mr. Stansbury, should be added to their number. We shall be in a civilised port the day after to-morrow, and can then decide whether or not we should build another diver containing one or ten additional improvements that have suggested themselves to Thomson and Powell and go back on another expedition."

"My boys, I have wealth enough to equip you with every appliance, and I will endeavour to procure a concession of the island from the German Government," said Mr. Preston. "Only come home with us first and have a rest."

"What do the partners say?" asked Tom, glancing round.

"Of course. Let us take the use of our money," said Jack. "We are well-off now."

Thomson and Powell nodded assent, and Miss Flora seemed greatly disappointed that Tom had even had the idea of doing anything else. She said nothing, however.

"What do you say, Captain?" continued Tom. But the Captain's emotion would not allow him to reply, nor could Stansbury when the question was put to him.

Two days afterwards they touched at Samarai, and three days later dropped anchor in Port Kennedy, the township on Thursday Island in Torres Strait. Here they disposed of their pearls and shell to the satisfaction of all concerned; but the largest and finest gem was, with the approval of the other partners, presented to Miss Preston by Tom.

Here also they gave Herr Buelon his liberty, and that gentleman, with many expressions of regret for what had happened, sailed that afternoon for Singapore on a vessel just leaving. Before he went he insisted on making some recompense for all the trouble caused by the Adventurers, but Mr. Preston told him coldly that none was required. The German seemed very much grieved at not being allowed to do something to show his sincerity, but that night a note was found in his old cabin, containing an open cheque on a London bank, and requesting that Mr. Preston would fill it in for the value of the *Southern Cross*.

"Here, Murray," Mr. Preston said, handing him the cheque, "I think Grenville, you and I will be partners too. We don't need Herr Buelon's money, but I know matters are not so fortunate with you. Fill in that

cheque in your own name for the value of a third share in the *Southern Cross.* We may as well forgive the man, and this will let him know that we have done so."

In Sydney a week later Mr. Preston gave a banquet in the Hotel Australia, at which were present all the partners and their old friends. A very guarded story came out in the *Telegraph* the following morning, for Mr. Penfold expected to go with the next expedition and did not wish to draw too much attention to it.

Kotay, Ah Sing, Aquinili, and two of the Kanakas are now waiting for the return of the pearl-seekers at Thursday Island. They have not yet spent the money they made out of the trip, and next time they will not be asked to sail in the same positions they occupied during the first cruise.

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